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KITCHENSPACE: GENDERED SPACES FOR CULTURAL REPRODUCTION, OR, NATURE IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF ORDINARY WOMEN IN CENTRAL MEXICO

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by

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Dedication

Para mi madre, Maruja Terremoto

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KITCHENSPACE: GENDERED SPACES FOR CULTURAL REPRODUCTION, OR, NATURE IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF ORDINARY WOMEN IN CENTRAL MEXICO

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The goal of this research was to understand how ordinary women in three semi-urban communities in central Mexico—Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala—experienced nature in their everyday lives. I explored the gendered spaces associated with food gathering and preparation, where women have unquestionable authority and responsibility in my region of study, using three people-centered, qualitative methodologies: participant-observation, ethnographic interviews, and maps of women's kitchens drawn by informants. My research took place primarily in *kitchenspace*, which I define as the place where food is prepared, whether indoors or outdoors—usually a combination of both—and including activity associated with everyday routines as well as ritual celebrations. The boundaries of kitchenspace are defined by social activity and gendered

relationships rather than by physical structures. This and other gendered spaces are often neglected in academic research, in part because of their inaccessibility to male researchers. The resulting lack of understanding obscures issues, and cultural and physical spaces of importance to society as a whole.

Kitchenspace it is at once the center of the household, and—in times of traditional celebrations—the center of community life, and a vital space from which women establish and maintain social reciprocity networks. It has little to do with the notion of domesticity and social isolation often associated with the suburban housewife. It is a privileged and gendered site of cultural reproduction, where a society's relationship with nature is inscribed in the patterns of everyday life and ritual celebrations. It is a site of adaptation and innovation where gendered subjects work within the parameters of cultural boundaries to accommodate changes in the natural and social landscapes. Territoriality and hierarchies within kitchenspace reflect its vital importance to the reproduction of social relations within and beyond the household, its value as a living cultural archive and laboratory, and that it is a source of power for many women in my region of study. Gendered and embodied knowledge including when and how to prepare certain foods is selectively transmitted to individual women from one generation to the next along with the grandmother's *mole* recipe and many beliefs and rituals unique to kitchenspace.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Prologue

CROSSINGS: 26 OF AUGUST, 2000

Llegar, cruzar la frontera, encontrarte con sonrisas
trabajadores en ropa sucia sentados atrás en camionetas, trabajando
gente a la orilla de la carretera
gente labrando la tierra a mano, con burros, con tractores
sombreros blancos del norte sequo, sequísimo
cerros humeando, tierra volando
llegando al valle de México seduce lo verde
sonoros los nombres
Querétaro
todo se desborda, caos vial, accidentes espeluznantes
infraestructura insuficiente, ineficiente, olor a caño
baños públicos sin papel, sin tapa, sin agua
pobreza en todo menos el ánimo de la gente, en los colores
niños indígenas piden limosna, manitas estiradas, vacías
Ajuchitlancito anuncia el letrero, llegamos a antiguas tierras náhuas
huele a lluvia, tierra mojada, tunas frescas, dulces, 40 pesos la caja
¿quieres probar?

A TASTE OF THREE PLACES

Xochimilco, Distrito Federal

Figure 1: *Se vende chinampa*
[Chinampa for sale]

Seven women in a circle. *Comadres* talking. Slitting *chiles guajillos* open with nails, deseeding. Two huge *costales* in the center. Do we leave *las venas* in? they ask. The *mayordoma* – Doña Gertrudis—decides. Later we use *Coca Cola* to wash our fingers—works best. But be careful who you touch, they joke. *Chalitos* from the freshly killed pig in an *olla de barro* by the fire. We will be served *tacos de chales*, on hot tortillas, *pico de gallo* also. In a basket covered with a hand embroidered napkin, the family's name is printed in gold letters. Over the fire, on the *tlicuil,* another huge *olla* where *la abuelita* stirs the pasta in fried tomato sauce. *Sopa de pasta,* to be served with the *carnitas* to those coming today for the house blessing. The new house, built for the *Niñopa*, who moves in with his thousands of clothes and toys. A priest will come to bless the house and the dancers' or *chinelos*' costumes, and to warn against drunkenness. A real priest—not a *cura chocolate*—as church officials call the impostors who sell their services for events out of the church, in people's houses and yards. The breeze changes and brings the smell of the pigs. Seventeen of them are left, to be slaughtered the coming week when *las tías* continue preparing the big feast for February second. *Día de la Candelaria*—the day a new *mayordomo* receives the *Niñopa* for the year and people take their *Niños Dios*, children, and corn to be blessed at the church. Looking up from my work, I see flowers and cauliflowers visible on the *chinampa* across the canal. The water barely visible under the scum on the surface. At the nearby *plaza de la Asunción*, a sign announces: *Se Vende Chinampa* (Figure 1).

Ocotepec, Morelos

Figure 2: *Este terreno es propiedad comunal* [This is communal property]

Walking through town, I hear the loudspeaker blasting from the roof of a car, announcing another meeting to organize against the theft of Ocotepec's communal lands for the construction of a supermarket (Figure 2). We arrive at Doña Dolores's house, where she makes *tortillas* by hand, outside, over her firewood stove. She has since she was eight, half a century ago, and sells them like many other women in this town, often to the city people from nearby Cuernavaca. She stands by her *metate*, using it to *amasar la masa* by hand, if no longer to grind it. *Siempre pone el nixtamal*—she still boils her own corn with lime—but now she takes it to grind at the *molino.* The *comal* is aluminum, though many in this town use *barro* even if it does break when children run into it. Born in Ocotepec, her grandparents as well, she stresses, she can tell me of the place. Her friend who brought me, Doña Isidra, no *es de aquí*. Born in Puebla*,* she came as a child more than fifty years ago. We help with the tamales. As usual, the *vaporera* has *ears*, corn husks tied on the handles, so the tamales will not hear fighting or disagreement. Otherwise *se enojan*—they get angry—and will never be done. We talk through the din of the hammers, as men build a house for younger family members, cement pouring beside the sleeping dogs. The land was all *milpa*—cornfield—Dolores tells me. Now there are houses. Soon her last cornstalks will disappear. *Qué triste.* How sad, she says. How will I live?

Tetecala, Morelos

Figure 3: Fertile fields in Tetecala

This is *tierra caliente*, a place where people cross the street to walk in the shade. *Tetecala la hermosa, pura gente buena.* Fertile fields covered with food (Figure 3). Used to be anyone with a mango orchard here was rich. Things have changed. This year they tried using growth hormones to beat the flood of mangos from the southern state of Guerrerro to market—every day counts. Tomatoes gave way to flowers for export. Two weeks ago tomatoes sold at twenty pesos per kilo in Mexico City, today they sell for three. No one laments the days they grew cucumbers and tomatoes, the seasons they would let the townspeople take the harvest rather than lose money getting produce to market in Cuernavaca. Now flowers go to *la Central de Abastos* in Mexico City, Brazil, and other places far away, while American and Japanese companies pay folks to grow okra or *angú* for export. An *apantle* or irrigation ditch brings the water to the fields, draining the river. Pesticides flow back in, polluting the river—along with the dead dogs people throw in, angering some. Walking through the fields of zapotes, mangos, bananas, *nopales*, papaya, corn, beans, squash, peanuts, nardos. Doña Eustoquia makes an impromptu harvest tool: she ties a short stick onto a long one and is not satisfied until our faces are black with zapote and I have two dozen to take home to the boys. At age 78, she loves walking in the countryside, gathering whatever is ripe, firewood for her stove and hot water heater, brush to make her brooms. Today she brings home a large rock—*está bonito*, she says, and will put it in her yard to look at. When things are ripe and falling on the ground you can take them, she says. Or what is on the edge of the field, *es para el caminante*. When she was young she was a goat –*una cabra*—and used to climb everything, she tells me. Now she feels heavy with sadness, but every chance she gets she walks in *el campo*: here she feels no worries.

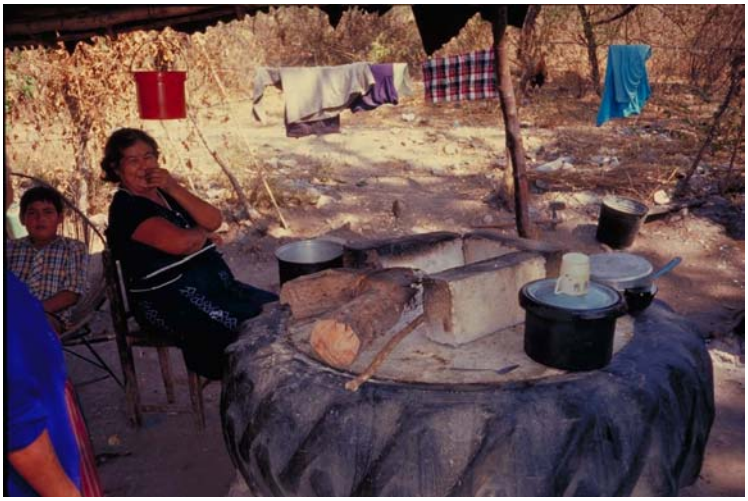

Figure 4: Squatter with tractor-tire stove

On the edge of town lands, we find a woman outside a shack, children sitting with her around the stove. *De Yautepec*, she answers our inquiry, and Doña Eustoquia warns her about buying *tierras ejidales*. Firewood burns on the cement-filled tractor tire, *tortillas* on the comal (Figure 4). Chickens cackle near her *chile* and *epazote* plants. Kind words notwithstanding, Doña Eustoquia is certain the woman is up to no good, living on the outskirts like that. Good people live in the center. Why do the newcomers leave their communities in Guerrero and Morelos? No good reason, certainly.

A MAP TO THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation consists of ten chapters and this prologue, as well as the customary front and back matter. It is divided into four sections: the introduction, two parts composing the body, and the findings. The first section consists of the prologue, and chapters one through three; the second includes chapters four through six; the third chapters seven through nine; the fourth is a single chapter discussing my findings. I chose to precede the first chapter with an appetizer of sorts, a "taste of the place" that aims to initiate the reader on a journey, beginning with a car trip from Texas to central Mexico. I have integrated photographs and figures throughout the text with an aim to communicate with images some aspects

of material culture and embodiment that I felt could not be accomplished with words. The back matter includes three appendices as well as my bibliographical references.

Section One introduces the reader to my sites and approach. Chapter One consists of an introduction to Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala, as well as my spaces of inquiry within these communities, including the research questions that guided my work. Chapter Two describes my qualitative methodology. Chapter Three includes a discussion of previous research with Mexican migrant women in the Austin vicinity that greatly influenced my doctoral research, and a brief literature review—primarily of feminist geography—of the works that led me to my subject and approach.

Sections Two and Three are the "body" of this work. As the title implies, it attempts to provide some sense of the experience of being or living in my research communities. This part is broken down into two parts, one describing different components of collective food celebrations, and another providing glimpses of everyday life in kitchenspace from the perspective of several individual women. In both cases, I include one chapter for each of my sites—Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala.

The three chapters of Section Two explore fiestas and the house-lot garden. These are organized chronologically to reflect the stages of food preparation surrounding particular dates or events and consist of a slightly enhanced version of selected participant-observation ethnographic notes. The next three chapters in Section Three include detailed kitchen narratives drawn from my

structured and unstructured interviews, many of them in the context of participant-observation events. With the aim of transmitting some of the vibrancy and humanity of the spaces and lives that form the basis of this work—and to allow my readers to make their own interpretations—none of these six chapters attempt a comprehensive analysis of the data presented, though they include some reflections that were part of the fieldwork process. The structure is provided by different celebratory events in chapters four through six, and by different individual women in chapters seven through nine.

While food preparation activity obviously occurs in the present, the fiestas and house-lot gardens of Section Two are linked to the past via the long-term preparation for celebrations. They also represent the future; often, the celebrations mark a new beginning and consist of a display or even performance of people's faith in the future. The kitchen narratives in the Section Three include much reminiscing of the past, an activity that seems inherent in the experience of kitchenspace in my region, where the ghosts or memories of people long gone crowd the table they once shared with those still living.

The nested scales of my inquiry begin with the embodied and gendered subject, at once a part of a household and a community (Figure 5). The food preparation activity at the heart of household and community spaces is supported by, and in turn supports, extended social networks. The social and cultural aspects of production and reproduction in these social and physical spaces are geographically specific to the culture region of central Mexico. While the order of these scales and spaces, if we begin with the activity of food preparation, starts at

the center—subject, then household, then community, and then region—access is exactly the reverse. For this reason, I introduce the reader to the semi-public spaces of the fiesta kitchen before entering the intimacy of women's kitchen narratives.

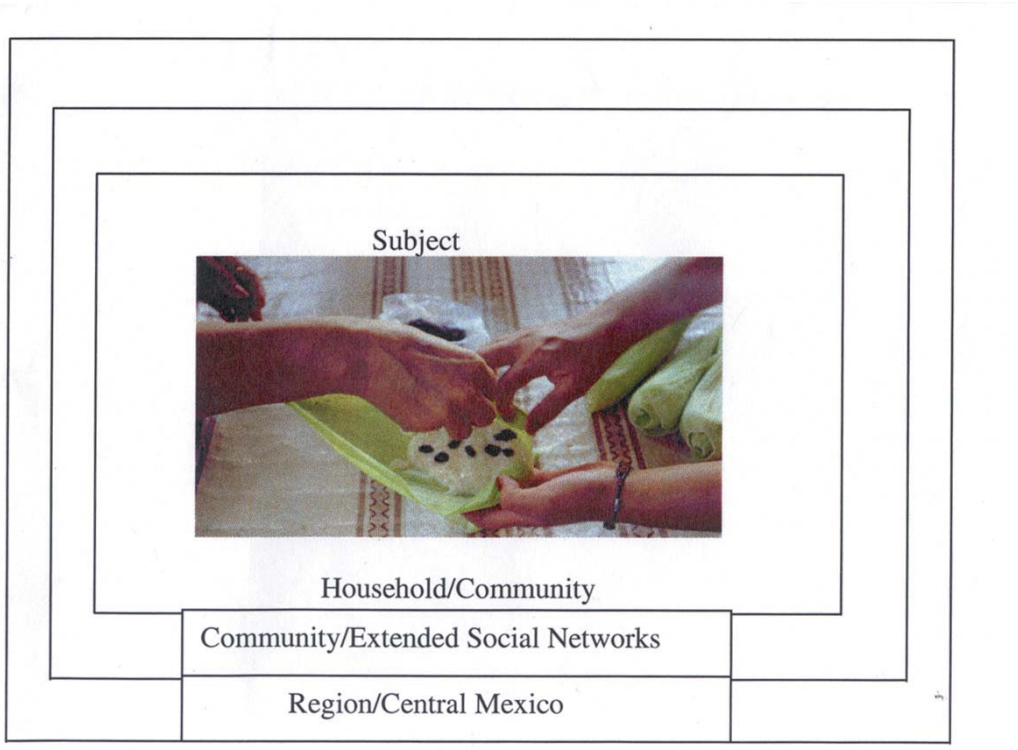

Figure 5: Nested scales

The three chapters on *Fiestas and the House-lot Garden* in Section Two focus on activities that take place in outdoor kitchenspace as women work to prepare for community celebrations. The three dedicated to *Kitchen Narratives* in Section Three revolve around individual women whose narratives about and from kitchenspace provide us with a sense of who they are in the context of their social

relationships, particularly in the household. In Section Four, I discuss my findings, bringing attention to some of the specific components of kitchenspace, such as the house-lot garden and the hearth, and its dual and gendered nature. I intend for this final chapter and section to raise questions and point to new areas of study, rather than to "conclude" the discussion.

Trying to stay true to the language of the place, I have left key words, phrases, and even monologues in first person and in Spanish, drawing on data from interviews. In addition to wanting to retain information that is lost in translation, I am reticent to put yet another layer of interpretation between the subjects in this dissertation and my readers. I have tried to avoid rendering their expressions and experiences sterile—despite my taking their words out of their socio-cultural contexts and placing them in a two-dimensional academic treatise. The translations I include are not always precisely literal, but seek to transmit the meaning of the expressions. In addition to the geographically-specific style and vocabulary of the Spanish used in my three sites, the language of kitchenspace includes many terms in Nahuatl or *Mexicano*. I provide a glossary in the back for these and other terms that I felt required clarification to facilitate the reading of this work. The more common foreign language words that are italicized in the body of this work are briefly described in the glossary (Appendix B).

Despite the key role of food preparation in community celebrations, it would be misleading to portray it as the only essential factor. For this reason, I include some "ingredients" that fall outside of the parameters of kitchenspace, but which I feel provide a necessary context to understanding the role played by

women and food preparation in community fiestas. As with cuisine, each element is important in combination but irrelevant alone. I also present individuals and events as interrelated with others: I hope to make clear that women are members of households and communities, special events are part of the fabric of everyday life, and particular activities come together with others that give the ensemble meaning within their social and spatial contexts. In fiestas, one family may host a celebration, but extended social networks in the community are activated to provide the necessary labor and resources for success, and are strengthened in the process.

In an attempt to communicate the experience of kitchenspace from the perspective of women whose lives are significantly defined by their activity there, I present my findings in a non-linear fashion, providing fragments of experience, rather than complete stories of people and places. I include sensual and intimate elements that are central to women's narratives and experience of kitchenspace, and seek to communicate some of the perspective and emotions of my informants. I seek to avoid constructing a metanarrative that might provide the illusion of "grasping the situation." I also embed other people's discourses in the primary narratives, as did my informants when they would recount conversations with others using the first person for all involved.[1] My intent is to portray partial but "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1996) that do not gloss over the contradictions and uncertainties inherent in human experience.

[1] Doña Margarita (Chapter Eight) is perhaps the most extreme example of this; because I recorded the interview with her on tape, I was able to leave in the details that transmit some of the flavor of the colloquial speech of a *Xochimilca* of her generation.

During my fieldwork, I often marveled at the absurdity of my attempt to capture the essence of place and experience in a little spiral notebook or my microcassete recorder. Despite my inadequacies in this sense, I hope the following pages provide my readers with some idea of the flavors, smells, sounds, and images of kitchenspace in Xochimilco, Ocotepec and Tetecala. If the text is contradictory and a bit chaotic, but full of life, it will begin to approximate the experience of being in kitchenspace in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala.

Chapter One: Spaces of Inquiry

Figure 6: Hands at work with *molcajete*

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The focus of my inquiry is the perspectives and practices of ordinary women in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala, all semi-urban communities with roots in prehispanic Nahuatl culture. I investigate gender, nature, and cultural identity by approaching food traditions in everyday life and *fiestas* through women's embodied experience, narratives, and maps (Figure 7). This represents one reading of *nature* and human interaction with the natural environment in a specific cultural setting: various concrete elements from nature are transformed into cultural artifacts through women's work in food preparation spaces, and, perhaps more importantly, the symbolic reaffirmation of human dependency on nature is expressed in celebrations based on the agricultural calendar and centuries of careful observation of nature.

My research framework is rooted in feminist political ecology (FPE), with an emphasis on gendered spaces and women's knowledge in relationship to

natural resources and the environment (Rocheleau, Slayter, and Wangari 1996), or what FPE calls the "sciences of survival." While feminist political ecology a point of departure for my inquiry, I focus more on the survival of culture than on the physical survival of humans or environment, though certainly the three are tightly linked in food preparation spaces. Also, unlike FPE, I focus not on women who organize politically around environmental issues, but on women whose social participation and relationship with the environment revolve primarily around their role in food preparation. I hope this work serves to push the parameters of FPE to further incorporate the diversity of gendered experiences in different parts of the world.

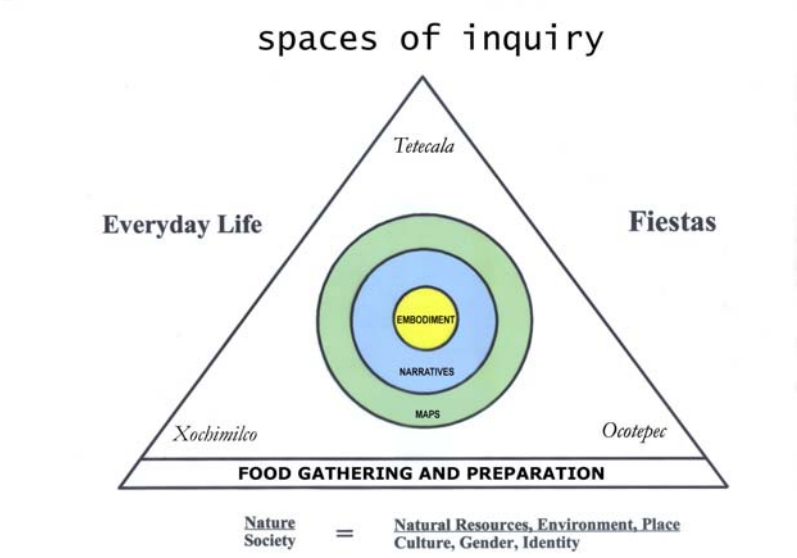

Figure 7: Spaces of inquiry

My research draws on literature from the social sciences concerning social reproduction (Merchant 1990), and feminist critiques of Western science that argue for the validity of knowledge gained from the lived experience (Harding 1991). The Cartesian dichotomies—particularly the mind/body and nature/culture splits—which serve as the basis for the dominant methodologies in the production of Western knowledge (Bordo 1986, Butler 1990 and 1993, Merchant 1980, Rose 1996), exclude the majority of women's contributions throughout history and those knowledges which do not fit into a positivist approach to reality.

I seek to incorporate the concept of "embodiment" as the existential ground of culture and self (Csordas 1994)[2]. This—and the particular attention I pay to women's hands at work (Figure 6) —helps me approach people as active subjects developing adaptive strategies and transforming their environment, rather than objects of investigation or victims of change. Incorporating embodiment also facilitates an experiential approach to individuals "dwelling" or "being" in particular environments, in the sense referred to by Heidegger (1971), Seamon and Mugerauer (1985) and Richardson (1982, 1984). Besides, as Buttimer pointed out (1980), "sense of place" has more to do with everyday life and actions than with thinking. I explore the experience or sense of place from the kitchen.

This dissertation takes cuisine as an expression of cultural identity (Simoons 1994, Counihan and Esterik 1997) and cooking practices and everyday living as spaces where ordinary people express desires and tastes, and resist the powerful forces that rework the social environment (de Certeau 1998, Curtin

[2] See Bondi (2002) for an approach to similar topics from the perspective of human geography.

1992). Since the 1980s, anthropologists have shown that the subject of food presents opportunities to investigate social and cultural transformations (Mintz (1985, 1996, and 1999, and Weismantel 1989a, b, and c, 1991, 1999). Schroeder's work (1990) represents the first geographical focus on the spaces of food preparation.

With its impressive series of cookbooks on Indigenous and popular foods published to coincide with the new millennium, the Mexican National Council for Culture and the Arts celebrates the cultural importance of its regional foods (Echevería and Arroyo 2000, Hernández Cortés 1999, Pérez San Vicente 2000, Torres Cerdán 2000). Many scholars have undertaken studies on the culture of corn in Mexico and its resistance in the face of the culture of wheat brought from the Old World by the Spaniards, and of misguided national agricultural and food policies (Bonfil Batalla 1982, Mier Merelo 2000, Pilchner 1998, Warman 1988). Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to the kitchen and the role of women in whose hands the preparation of culinary dishes usually lie.

In the classic *Many Mexicos* first published in 1941, Lesley Byrd Simpson referred to corn as an "exacting" and "demanding" "tyrant" that is the common heritage of Mexico. "From one end of Mexico to the other the grinding of the *masa* and the patting of tortillas is the morning song of life," and is "so thoroughly a part of the immutable *costumbre*," reflected Simpson, that "the vendors of the labor-saving gadgets and those kindly people who would emancipate the Indian women from her ancient drudgery will not completely interrupt the rhythm of the *tortilleras*" (Simpson 1967: 12-13). Despite many

changes, it is still true that the rhythm of life is to a great extent in the hands of women in the kitchen, Indian or mestizo, and that corn is still the common denominator in central Mexico.

From the microspace of the kitchen in three sites in central Mexico, I explore the texture of women's lives and spaces. While feminist in approach, subject, and spaces, my research is fundamentally traditional, field-based, cultural geography of the type Parsons called for when he warned of the dangers of "armchair" geography:

> "Remotely sensed imagery, the availability of detailed maps, and especially the computer data bases with their unprecedented masses of census and other statistical data have made 'armchair' geography an increasing reality, as has the priority given to 'meaning' as opposed to the gathering and presentation of evidence." (Parsons 1994: 286)

Techniques and technologies are increasingly dominating the field of geography in general, and studies of human-environment relations in particular. In this context, this research may be of importance more because it calls attention to the humans that are increasingly left out of geographical inquiry, than to the women that have traditionally been excluded from the "human" in human geography (Monk and Hanson 1982).

In the body of this work, I present selections of "evidence" gathered during one calendar year of ethnographic fieldwork. To a great extent, this consists of the voices and perspectives of my informants. I seek to avoid assigning authoritative "meanings" of my own prior to the discussion of findings in Section Four. My goal with this is twofold: that my informants represent their own spaces

and experiences to the extent possible, and that my readers form their own conclusions.

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH SITES

My investigation of nature/society relations centers on three semi-urban research sites—Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala—in central Mexico that are more representative of Latin America's increasingly urban society than the tropical rainforests often targeted for environmental research and conservation by the international scientific community (Figure 8). While tropical bio-diversity is concentrated in northern and southern Mexico, it is in the central highland where the majority of the population has historically concentrated and, together with industrial and agricultural activities, put tremendous pressure on natural resources. Research in this area can provide insights into comparable Latin American contexts where people of traditional and mestizo cultures face new challenges upon migrating to urban centers in search of a living, or when the growth of nearby cities—aptly called *la mancha urbana* [the urban stain] in Mexico—transforms their communities into suburbs, bedroom communities, or periurban areas (Avila Sánchez 1997, Canabal Cristiani 2000, Losada 1998, Torres Lima 2000, Rueda Hurtado 2001). In a world now over 50% urban—with Latin America in particular an overwhelmingly, and increasingly urban society (Doolittle et al. 2002)—scholars and policy makers alike will have to grapple with new dimensions of human interaction with the natural environment and the fact that in developing countries, "urban" populations often retain many aspects—and spaces—of non-urban culture (WinklerPrins 2001), creating what scholars in Latin America have called a *nueva ruralidad* [new rurality] (Giarracca 2001).

Figure 8: Map of sites

Reflecting the diversity that characterizes Middle America in general and Mexico in particular (West, Augelli, et al. 1989), each of my sites is unique in terms of ethnicity, physical geography and cultural traditions, while sharing many

cultural traits characteristic of Mesoamerica. Robert West underscores the importance of this region:

> "The Mesa Central of Mexico is the largest and culturally the most significant of the Middle American tropical highlands. From the archeological record it appears that since Preclassic, or Formative times (1500-200 B.C.) the high plateau surface has supported a large population. Here are found some of the largest of the ancient ceremonial and urban centers of Mesoamerica, particularly in the Valley of Mexico and environs on the eastern side of the plateau. Still today, the Mesa Central forms the core of Mexico's population and economy." (West 1971: 371)

Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala are located along the Neovolcanic axis in the Mesa Central of the Mexican Plateau and share a once-fertile lacustrine environment. Xochimilco, the northernmost of my three sites, lies just south of Mexico City. Tetecala, the furthest south, is located in the adjoining state of Morelos near its border with the states of Guerrero and Mexico. Ocotepec, just outside of Cuernavaca, the capital of Morelos, is just south of the Chichinautzin nature reserve, approximately sixty kilometers from both Xochimilco and Tetecala. Traveling at least part of the distance on the *Autopista del Sol*—the toll road that connects the capital with Acapulco—it takes approximately two hours to drive from one end of my sites to the other. An extensive network of buses, *rutas,* and *colectivos*[3] connects the three as well, with Cuernavaca and Mexico City as obligatory transfer points, and is the most common form of transportation for residents of the three sites.

[3] The collective taxis or mini-vans that provide public transportation for the majority in each of my three sites.

Figure 9: Rice in Tetecala

The altitude varies among my sites, with Xochimilco the highest at approximately 2,240 meters above sea level. In Morelos, temperatures increase progressively with the drop in altitude heading south: at 1,560 meters above sea level, Ocotepec's climate is slightly cooler; at 980 meters above sea level Tetecala is much hotter, with average temperatures around 22° Celsius (Martínez Velázquez 1998, Avila Sanchez 1997, Aguilar Benítez 1998). The dry season in the region begins in March and lasts through mid-May, while the rainy season goes from June through October. Farmers in the region with access to irrigation

obtain two harvests a year, one *de riego* [irrigated] and one *de temporal* [with rainwater] (Figure 9).

Given the changing and heterogeneous nature of my research sites, while I refer to Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala as "communities" throughout this work, this by no means implies a homogenous unit of people with identical interests or behaviors (Agrawal 1997).[4] To the contrary: gender, generation, ethnicity, class, and other differences are important and reflected in food preparation practices and spaces, among others. In my sites, perhaps no category is as important as whether a person is *de aquí* [from here]. "Belonging" or not is a matter of some tension and reflects some of the complexities and contradictions inherent in any notion of collective identity; it seems to be defined to a great extent by the relationship to the land, and is reaffirmed through participation in community fiestas. People whose families worked the land for generations, regardless of the type of tenure (communal, ejido, chinampas, private), consider themselves and are considered by others to be members of the community. At

[4]I would prefer to use the word *pueblo*, but this does not have an appropriate counterpart in English and indeed has negative connotations in Spanish. The word "village" brings up the specter of the anthropologists' idea of poor, primitive people with quaint customs that have not changed for centuries, and the classic studies of Tepoztlán by Redfield (1930) or Lewis (1960, 1963). The word "town" brings rural America to mind, yet the accompanying notion of frontier individuals on their own has nothing to do with the settlements to which I refer. These *pueblos* are bound together by collective practices, a shared history with indigenous roots, and centuries of the mestizaje and discrimination of rural and indigenous elements that has long characterized Mexico. Nonetheless I do not feel the term "poverty" or "poor" describes the communities in question, as such a term would seems to be defined by city standards and carry an implicit condemnation of traditional culture, and an assumption that new technologies, rampant consumerism, and other components of "progress" is something to which people should aspire. In fact, while by American standards most of the informants with whom I worked would be considered "poor"—and indeed many of them considered themselves *pobres*, *gente humilde, campesinos*, or *trabajadores*, there was considerable difference in their resources (income or otherwise), something that was always evident in kitchenspace. Significantly, however, all of them drew upon considerable support from extended family and community networks, and had faith in tomorrow.

some level, particularly in relation to decisions over local land—perhaps exacerbated by the changes in the constitution allowing for the sale of ejido—locals deny this status to "newcomers," regardless of the years they may have lived in the town.[5]

The changing nature of the population, with wave after wave of immigrants from poorer parts of the Republic, and constant outmigration to the United States or Northern Mexico, constantly redefines the boundaries of each of my communities. The collective identity in each—to the extent that there is one—is in part based on marking and redefining the boundaries in relation not only to relative newcomers, but in contrast to the nearby cities and towns, such as Tepepan in the case of Xochimilco, Ahuatepec in the case of Ocotepec, and Coatetelco in the case of Tetecala. In all three, this contrast with the "Other" and nearby community is often described in terms of culinary traditions.

Figure 10: Glyph of Ocotepec

All three of my sites are prehispanic in origin. Their names are derived from Nahuatl. *Xochimilco* means *where flowers are sown*, (from *xochitl* = flower; *mil-li* = cultivated earth; and *co* = place). *Ocotepec* means *hill of the pine tree*, (*cerro del ocote*, from *Ocotl*-ocote, *tepetl*-cerro) as

[5] Even through intermarriage, people are not easily accepted; their outsider status is made clear in traditional community spaces where issues affecting the community are discussed and decisions are made.

illustrated by its prehispanic glyph (Figure 10). The word *Tetecala* means *place with many houses with stone vaults* (*Tete* = stone, *Tecali* = house with vaults, *la* = or *tla* refers to large quantity; or *Tetekalla*, from *Tete* = plural of stone, *kalli* = house, *Tlan* = contraction meaning abundant place).

One of the eight original Nahuatl groups to migrate from the mythical Aztlán to the Valley of Mexico (Figure 11), the historical record shows that the Xochimilcas settled on the edges of lake Tenochtitlan just after the collapse of the Toltec Empire in 1156 A.D. (Martínez Marín 1968 in Maldonado Jiménez 2000: 244). From there, they extended to parts of Morelos beginning in 1300, and were one of three groups to settle in what is now Ocotepec. According to several accounts, the Tlahuicas—also one of the eight groups from Aztlán—founded the first barrio in Ocotepec, which existed prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, and is still known by its original name of Tlalnihuic,[6] as well as its official, Spanish name of la Candelaria (Maldonado Jiménez 2000, von Mentz de Boege 1995). A sixteenth century map of the parish of Cuernavaca shows Ocotepec to be one league outside of the city.

Tetecala first appears on a 1583 map referring to the *pueblos* that compose part of the Alcaldía Mayor of Cuernavaca (Oriak Villegas 1997), though vestiges of prehispanic human settlement from the Olmec, Chichimec, and Tlahuica period have been found in the region. After an earthquake that destroyed the town, Tetecala was founded in 1680 by mestizo and mulato immigrants from Guerrero

[6] I found several different pronunciations of the name. Morayta (2000) refers to it as Tlanihuili.

fleeing abuses at the hands of the Spaniards. Becoming a municipality in 1821, it became a city, acquiring its current name of Tetecala de la Reforma in 1873.

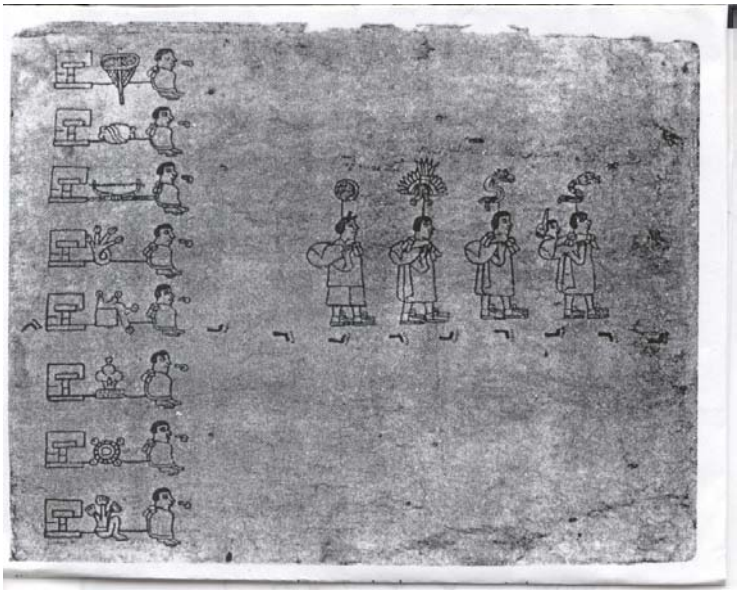

Figure 11: Boturini Codex plate 2. Migration of 8 groups that migrated from Aztlán, represented with their glyphs and houses (*calli)*. The Tlahuicas are the third down; Xochimilco is third from the bottom. (In Boone 1991: 126, Figure 8.3.)

While the residents of each of my three sites purchase the majority of the food today, in each one some people—primarily older men—still plant subsistence corn, beans, and other crops; some people raise their own animals—often women—and most recognize and appreciate the taste of truly fresh food. They share an agricultural tradition, with a diversity of expression. In Xochimilco, people have been producing flowers and food crops on raised-bed *chinampa* agriculture for over 500 years (Figure 12); the chinampas are still the basis of the region's intensive agriculture (Crossley 1999, Ezcurra 1990, Rojas 1990) as well as cultural identity (Canabal Cristiani 1997). Morelos, on the other hand, and especially the agricultural region surrounding where Tetecala is located, has long been known for its plantations of rice and sugar cane, and a smallholder agriculture and *campesino* tradition that gave rise to the national agrarian hero, Emiliano Zapata (Sarmiento Silva 1997, Warman

1976). As early as 1594, Tetecala is considered to have had significant agriculture, and by the late nineteenth century, it was a market for the sale of locally grown sugar cane, banana, jícama, Mexican plum, watermelon, mamey, corn, and beans (Rangel Montoya 2000).

Figure 12: Three brothers harvesting *romero* on their chinampa

The populations for my three sites differ in size among other things. Xochimilco is much larger than Ocotepec and Tetecala put together. For this reason, and due to my prior relationships, I chose to focus on only one of its seventeen traditional *barrios,* one considered by most locals to be one of the most traditional, a place where people keep customs alive—*ahí guardan las*

costumbres. All three of my sites show an increase in population in recent years, even as they lose local population to outmigration. Xochimilco's population in 2000 of 369,787 (INEGI 2000) is up from 332,314 five years earlier, and 116,493 in 1970 (Secretaría de Industria y Comercio 1971). Those numbers refer to the population of the *delegación de Xochimilco* (including the town proper and the smaller villages), while my own work is focused on one of it barrios. Tetecala's "official" population count in was 6,917 as of 2000 (INEGI 2000), up from 4,514 in 1970 (Secretaría de Industria y Comercio 1971).

Cuernavaca (whose numbers include Ocotepec) went from 160, 804 in 1970 (Secretaría de Industria y Comercio 1971) to 338,706 in 2000 (INEGI 2000). In 1995, Ocotepec's official population count stood at 8,451 (INEGI SCINCEC 1995). While city authorities may consider it to be a sub-unit of Cuernavaca today, Ocotepec is a community (*poblado)* outside of the city known for its traditions and fiestas. A sign on the outskirts of town indicates that Cuernavaca is two kilometers away.

Common ingredients in my field sites include changes of land use and livelihoods, markets replacing fields as a source of food, and changing gender roles in the kitchen particularly as young men and women study or take jobs away from home. Yet many food traditions persist, even if the details of their preparation have been evolving over time, with older women playing an essential role, taking pleasure and pride in food preparation both in their homes and their communities. Corn and beans remain fundamental staples in these once rural towns, and firewood is still used in cooking, if only for tortillas and fiestas.

Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala have all been urbanized to different degrees. Their relationship to city life has progressively changed with an increasing insertion of the population into the urban labor market, the arrival of multiple waves of migrants from poorer regions in Mexico and "refugees" from Mexico City, and heightened crime related to drugs, poverty and government corruption. Despite the differences between the three sites, related in part to their proximity to Mexico City and relationship to the land, population growth and urbanization, combined with inheritance patterns, have had visible impacts on the traditional kitchen and the house-lot garden. Nonetheless, each retains many rural traditions and attitudes.

DEFINING KITCHENSPACE

Figure 13: Kitchenspace

My research took place primarily in *kitchenspace*, which I define as the place where food is prepared, whether indoors or outdoors—usually a combination of both—and including activity associated with everyday routines as well as ritual celebrations (Figure 13). It became clear shortly into my year of fieldwork that the word *kitchen* or *cocina*—as used in Mexico as well as in the United States—was too narrow a term. Defined as a *place with cooking facilities* (Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary) or a *room or part of a room or building in which food is prepared and cooked* (Microsoft Word dictionary), the word and especially the contemporary connotation of "kitchen" fails to incorporate the

complexity and nature of the multiple spaces in which I found women preparing and cooking food in each of my three sites. My definition of kitchenspace is not dependent on any structure or cooking facility per se, but is instead created and maintained by the food preparation activity carried out by gendered subjects on a regular or periodic basis. In this sense, it provides a framework for the exploration of what Butler calls "the performance of gender" (Butler 1990).

DOMESTIC SPACES: HOME

My interest is in what some might call "domestic," or "private" space. Besides the space inside the home, and the family unit, usually associated with this, I include in this definition the house-lot garden and community relations—because that is where my focus on kitchenspace takes me. Geographers, sociologists, and others have studied the importance of the household unit for the economic survival strategies and well-being of the family and of women (Almeida Salles 1988, Barbieri 1984, Dwyer 1988, Friedmann 1992, González de la Rocha 1986, Kimber 1966, Loyd 1975 and 1981, McC. Netting 1993, Oberhauser 1995 and 1997, Reinhardt 1988 and Velázquez Gutiérrez 2000, Schroeder 1990). Arizpe (1989) stresses that the role of women in this space is vitally important for cultural reproduction, especially in the case of indigenous communities. In addition, Keys (1999) shows in his feminist political ecology study of urban kitchen gardens in Highland Guatemala, that this is the site in which Maya women not only supplement household needs, but have a primary

role educating children—transmitting knowledge and values—regarding the natural environment.

Considering the diverse and multivalent nature of women's meanings and experiences of home in a North American context, Ahrentzen says that the narrow spectrum we see in popular media and academic research "is framed by an ideology that supports dichotomy rather than diversity—of a division of 'home life' from 'work life,' of a private from public sphere" (Ahrentzen 1997: 77). Thus, she says, studies on the home tend to portray it either nostalgically, or as "the major site of women's oppression." The same ideology that upholds a sexually separatist system of public and private spheres identifies women with the private sphere "best exemplified by the domicile and domesticity, and men with the public sphere of labor and politics" (Ahrentzen 1997: 79). Challenging the conventional ideal of the privatized home, she presents a "cacophony of voices and experiences…and demonstrates a greater variety in women's experiences and meanings of home than the research literature often suggests" (Ahrentzen 1997: 87).

In the tradition of feminist geography, I too seek to present a diversity of voices and experiences from domestic spaces that do not necessarily fit a predetermined mold. As I hope to show in the upcoming pages, the spaces of inquiry where my research takes place have very little to do with the notion of domesticity and social isolation often associated with the suburban housewife, and that is often incorrectly called private space. To begin with, the homes I visited in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala tended to be multigenerational, and

have more than one person in the kitchen. But in the case of a community celebration, the kitchen or house-lot garden became the center of community activity and a vital space from which women established and maintained social reciprocity networks.

Domosh considers various studies on kitchens (Buckley 1996, Lupton 1992, and Sparke 1995) and the significance of the kitchen "as a site of confirming gender and sexual identities in various distinct cultural contexts" (1998: 277). Suggesting that geographers long avoided the home "because these spaces are so meaningful, so complex and so close that we tend to keep our distance from them in our research," she concludes that feminist geography has shown the home to be "rich territory…for understanding the social and the spatial" (1998: 281). Kitchenspace in my sites is both a workspace and a space of gendered politics; it is, I will argue, a privileged site of cultural and social reproduction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall question guiding my fieldwork was: "How is nature in the everyday lives of ordinary women?" More specifically, using a fundamentally ethnographic approach, I probed the following three related questions:

1) "What are the gendered spaces in the landscape associated with food gathering and preparation and how have women adapted to changes in these spaces during their lifetime?"

2) "What do women know about their environment from the context of food gathering and preparation in their everyday lives and how do they interact with nature in this context?" And

3) "What can women's narratives about food in their specific geographic contexts tell us about their culture and identity?"

My fieldwork also led me to consider the social, aesthetic, and symbolic aspects of kitchenspace.

My inquiry was not aimed at exploring kitchenspace, but rather women's perspectives, narratives and experiences with food gathering and preparation as per the questions above (Figure 14). This, I assumed, would bring me closer to understanding my informants' experience of nature. My focus on these three questions brought me to focus on and indeed discover kitchenspace, but only after nine months of extensive fieldwork in several other central Mexico communities in addition to my three final sites.

Figure 14: Gendered perspectives from kitchenspace

Chapter Two: Methodology

I employed three distinct qualitative methodologies: participant-observation, ethnographic interviews, and maps of women's kitchens drawn by informants (Spradley 1979; Richardson 1982, 1984, 1990; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Edmunds 1995).[7] The first was aimed at observing women's physical interaction with their environment, as well as helping me understand their experiences by sharing them to the extent that I was able. I accompanied women to the market to buy food and chat with vendors, and, in one case, to gather foliage for their rabbits (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Outdoor market in Xochimilco

I went with them on walks in the countryside to gather fruits from the trees. I helped with the extensive food preparation weeks prior to community and family celebrations, such as preparing sweet corn tamales[8] to celebrate the corn harvest, cleaning rice, chopping kilos of carrots for rice, peeling sacks of tamarind, and removing the veins and seeds from chilies destined

[7] See sample interview questionnaire, Appendix A.
[8] *Tamales de elote.*

for *mole* until my fingers burned. I also helped prepare common, everyday meals, ate a lot, and washed my share of dishes (Figure 16 and 17).

Figure 16: Cleaning rice for Domingo de Ramos

In all my encounters with informants, previous contact or an introduction by a mutual acquaintance facilitated quality research data, though this was not always possible. In others, I earned people's confidence gradually, in part through my participation in kitchenwork activities during community celebrations. I introduced myself to new informants in Tetecala and Ocotepec as a university student from Texas studying food customs in their community and exploring women's perspectives from the kitchen. In Xochimilco, I was already known in the area where I concentrated my research, *el callejón Bodoquepa,* as a neighbor and *la mamá de los gueritos*—the mother of the little *blondies*—two of whom were born there. There, any possible student identity was fully overshadowed by my previous role in the community. Many of the women with whom I worked were the same ones I had trusted to take my children out to play,[9] who had fed them fresh, hot tortillas, *atoles*[10], and teas in their homes. They had wrapped them

[9] All the girls were in love with my little boys and their blond curls and some of them, along with some older women, would ask to *borrow* them to for a short while.
[10] A hot, gruel-like drink usually made with corn (in many forms), though sometimes oats.

in *rebozos* and carried them against their bodies; and taken them to children's birthday parties to eat cake, tamales and *piñata* candy.

Figure 17: Washing dishes after Día de la Santa Cruz

In Ocotepec, I had previous acquaintance with some people who considered themselves to be *originarios de Ocotepec* from having lived in Cuernavaca for a year before my field research. I made contact with others through my children's school, which their children attended as well, and by following up on as many leads as I could. In Tetecala, I was fortunate that several colleagues (from the UNAM and the state university, the UAEM) and my landlady in Cuernavaca—who was from there and whose mother owned a little store[11] in town and "knew everybody"—had introduced me to friends and family living there. Whether in Xochimilco or my other sites, the two-way relationship with informants was developed over time. I observed and asked them questions; they observed and asked me questions. Both of us set boundaries that were renegotiated as time progressed and trust developed.

[11] La tiendita in Mexico supplies everything from milk to shampoo, and this one had been the only one for decades, though a competitor had recently set up shop right next-door.

Figure 18: Gathering firewood in Tetecala

Gender roles weighed heavily in my research and my relationship with informants. Sharing time and spaces with my informants included joining them in recreational activities with my family, and balancing different roles. Having children facilitated my relationship with informants, at the same time that my parenting responsibilities—along with the distance between my three sites—impeded the immersion I wanted. My parenting duties were fully acceptable and understandable to my informants, much more so than my intellectual aspirations.

Figure 19: Juan at Rosita's birthday party

My sons were present even when they were not accompanying me, so important were they as an organizing principle and common cultural denominator. When I could not stay to eat after spending all morning preparing food with one of my informants, my inappropriate and untimely departure was acceptable only because I was leaving to pick up my children from school, and because my informants were able to send food along for Juan and Mario. Not having children in the cultural context of my research sites would have made my work much more difficult. My sons' participation in household and community celebrations was important as well (Figures 19 and 20).

Finally, I believe my willingness to help in the kitchen, working alongside my informants, and to learn from them as I carried out tasks that fully revealed my manual incompetence, helped people gain confidence in me or at least amuse themselves with my efforts. They laughed at my lopsided tortillas and poorly wrapped tamales. When I helped make bean tamales for Palm Sunday in Ocotepec, the women giggled gleefully and told me that I was earning a degree in *remojar hojas de maíz,* or soaking cornhusks. That day I learned there was more to unwrapping dried cornhusks without breaking them than meets the eye.

Figure 20: Mario at the river after the *tamalada*

At the same time, my enthusiasm and interest in their food customs, and the pleasure with which I ate what they cooked facilitated a relationship with my informants, including new acquaintances, some of whom became my friends. They were pleased and often surprised that a person they identified as urban, educated and of higher social status appreciated their food, including the blood sausage made from a freshly slaughtered pig, for instance. Without a doubt, sharing a part of our lives and especially, kitchenspace, allowed us to get to know each other and breach some of the distance separating us.

Figure 21: Going to the market with my neighbor in Xochimilco

Despite the initial difficulty of accessing the private space of home kitchens, and the hectic schedule most women maintained, my informants were generally pleased to have someone listen to what they had to say. I carried out well over 100 unstructured interviews, sometimes standing in a woman's doorway, sitting on the sidewalk waiting for a parade, drinking beer at a *quinceañera*[12] or baptism, cleaning hibiscus flowers for *agua de jamaica* or iced tea at a kitchen table, or walking to the market (Figure 21). I took notes during many of these conversations, depending on the relationship with the informant. In every case I made it clear that I was a student researching food traditions, and obtained permission to interview, observe, and participate when possible.[13] Yet just as my interest in cooking with the women as opposed to eating with the men was always surprising to new informants, I found that pulling out a notebook and taking notes was even more startling and a sure way to interrupt the flow of conversation. Often, I jotted

[12] A traditional celebration on a girl's fifteenth birthday, marking her passage into womanhood.
[13] People's kitchens and yards are not places where one can easily work without tacit approval, if not invitation and escort!

down only key words or phrases, and then in the most unobtrusive manner possible, writing up lengthier, detailed accounts in privacy shortly thereafter.

Figure 22: Conversations with Esmeralda

As the women with whom I worked became more accustomed to me, I was less discrete about my camera and my notebook. While some women were suspicious of note taking, others insisted I write down what they said, afraid I would forget, and wanting their words to be remembered. It was clear, however, that even when my informants were comfortable with my presence they took on a *public* or official stance and tended to ham it up around my notebook and camera. Participant-observation definitely brought me closer to everyday behavior and conversation than interviews.

Just as Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1965) reported about her work with women in an Iraqui village, I found that once I had a place in the circle accompanying women in their routines, I was able to make progress. After many weeks of the awkwardness of being treated as a special guest of the sheik despite her desire to participate in local women's ordinary activities, Fernea reports improvements in her work after she took on an embroidery project and joined them in this regular activity:

> "After that I took my pillowcase whenever I went visiting. The women all remarked on it, but after the first few minutes I found I could sit quietly

> and stab my needle through the cheap cotton, and little by little the group would forget my strange presence and talk on as though I were one of them. I had a place in the circle and something to do; I did not have to make conversation every single minute and, as my Arabic improved, I found I was learning a great deal by simply listening." (Fernea 1965: 85)

Working with the "women of the circle" (as I came to think of the collective work parties, usually in the shape of a circle) in my research meant that I too could keep my hands busy with the same task that occupied theirs, and concentrate on listening rather than talking. In this way, the disturbance caused by my presence interfered little with the group's activities and conversation. While recognizing that there are barriers to being a "participant-observant" that every ethnographer confronts, the space of everyday life does help overcome some of the obstacles. At the same time, the spatial formation of a circle not uncommon to women's collective projects—quilt making comes to mind—is one that, while it helps facilitate group participation, as any military strategist knows, it is also very effective for keeping out intruders. The circle is a powerful configuration with a clearly defined boundary: it can exclude as well as include, and it is the members of that circle who have the power to make the determination one way or another. Joining women at the circle was never easy and not always possible.

Academics have often critiqued the disproportionate power of the researcher over his or her informants, yet it is just as important to recognize that informants often have the power to deny the researcher access, or to provide misleading information. While recognizing the responsibility a researcher has to the human subjects whose lives form part of his or her *data*, I would suggest that

academics' exaggerated sense of self-importance and lack of recognition of ordinary people's agency often confuses this issue.

In addition to many unstructured interviews and nearly three hundred days of participant-observation, I completed several, lengthy, formal interviews in each of my sites, including a few recorded on tape. After nearly five months into my year of fieldwork, I developed a four-part questionnaire, which I modified after a few trial runs a month later[14]. With some help from local research assistants in Ocotepec and Tetecala, we applied a total of seventeen structured interviews in the last month of fieldwork, twelve of these recorded on tape. The first part introduced the informant, their community, and the research theme, and was useful in defining my sites from the perspective of their inhabitants. In the case of Xochimilco, people were very aware that their view contrasted with the official story of an ecological paradise. They joked that it was a place of *aguas verdes* or green water, instead of the *areas verdes* or green spaces referred to in government brochures, and that it was a miraculous place where your property grows.[15] In all cases, my informants provided an *inside* story that usually goes untold or unrecorded.

A second part of my questionnaire focused on spaces supplying food and other ingredients needed for cooking such as fuel and dishes. It sought to determine the informants' access to and perspectives on environmental and market conditions, and the relevance of these spaces to their food gathering and

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[14] Appendix A.

[15] *Venga a Xochimilco, donde sus terrenos crecen,* [Come to Xochimilco, where your properties grow], one informant joked, in reference to the practice of filling in the canals with dirt, rocks, and garbage so as to extend the property line.

preparation. This data provides a frame of reference for my focus on kitchenspace.

A third part looked at culture and technology, delving into the knowledge required to obtain and prepare certain foods, where that knowledge was gained, and how it was transmitted (or not) to younger generations. Here, I paid special attention to gender roles and came across a few surprises. In Xochimilco, for instance, a few decades ago when most households farmed and sold produce for a living, grandfathers commonly prepared meals for the children and taught girls to cook as the grandmothers were at the market selling and the parents working in the city.

A final part touched on social relations, including spaces of reciprocity and power. It explored the social importance of food preparation, and strategies from the kitchen such as what women prepared when time was short or food scarce. Perhaps more interesting from a cultural perspective was the substitutions that were or were not acceptable in the kitchen, and under what circumstances.

Towards the end of my year of fieldwork, I embarked on my participative mapping approach, asking informants to draw maps of their kitchen and include the things that were most important to them. In an earlier pilot project in Austin, I had found that women's drawings of their landscapes surprised me with perspectives outside of the parameters of my own thinking and redirected my research focus. One woman's drawing of a *maguey* or century plant in particular, together with her sensual and emotional description of the harvesting process, clued me in to the importance of paying attention to food gathering and

preparation, as well as to emotions and embodied experience, none of which I had contemplated at that point.

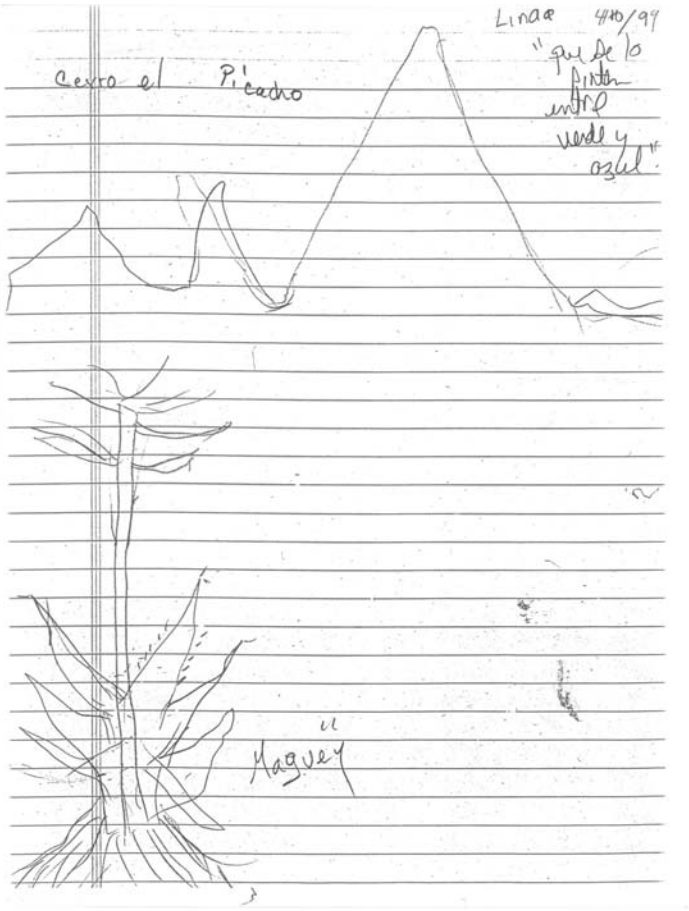

Figure 23: Linda's map of maguey landscape

In addition to the above, and as an effort to document the extensive and complex material culture of the kitchen, I made detailed inventories of the containers, tools, food supplies and other items in several kitchens. This took place during the final weeks of fieldwork and only in the homes of a few close informants. I also took over forty rolls of slides during the year. Always, I paid close attention to details, emotions and embodiment; I listened with my ears and my heart as women described their lives and communities from the perspective of

kitchenspace; and I tried to understand their representations of kitchenspace on paper (Figure 24).

Throughout my research, I struggled to understand the stories and spaces women shared with me on their own terms. Again and again, my assumptions and ideas about nature and society interfered, as did the many luxuries I take for granted. When I replay the interviews I have on tape, I hear things I missed the first time around because I was listening for something different. My understanding of people, places and events was limited by the preconceived notions that filtered my interpretation of the participant-observation and predisposed me to observe and hear certain things while ignoring others. As I became more and more familiar with my research subjects, details I previously found insignificant came to the foreground. Fortunately, I had generous and intelligent informants in each of my sites who called my attention to things they felt I should consider, introduced me to people, took me to places, and helped me put some of the pieces together.

Figure 24: Attention to detail

There is no one answer to the overarching question "How do ordinary women in central Mexico experience nature in their everyday lives?" that guides my research, and I will not attempt to provide one here. Like cultural identity, it is too complex and

dynamic to adequately explain. While each of my methodologies had shortcomings and even produced conflicting data, I believe that the combination of multiple sites and approaches gave me access to different perspectives that allows for a less clear and thus perhaps more faithful depiction here. While this makes it difficult to generalize and form the definitive conclusions that the academic world seems to prefer, it brings me closer to my goal of understanding how different women in one part of the world experience their natural environment.

Chapter Three: Preliminary Research

WHY LOOK FOR NATURE IN THE KITCHEN?

I did not initially plan to write about kitchens, though few things link humans to the earth as concretely as food, or reflect cultural traditions as clearly as food preparation. The spaces in which most of the women spent so much of their time—their homes and gardens—seemed to matter little next to the rainforests, the booming urban areas, the agricultural or industrial settings that draw the attention of biodiversity experts, policy-makers, and environmental engineers. My preliminary research—as well as my work with environmental issues on the U.S.-Mexico border—led me to realize that I had to work outside the usual parameters of environmental research if I wanted to incorporate gendered subjects and spaces, and ordinary people's sense of nature.

The very notion of "environment" is culturally grounded in an approach to the earth that is not shared by everyone who lives on the planet and that reflects a post-industrial vocabulary and conceptualization. The anthropocentric implication of the term is that it is "our" environment, surrounding us and for us to use as we like, including as a dumpsite for our wastes. Of course, many argue that we would do better to rationalize our use of the environment and plan for sustainable development so that we can use it in the future as well. The term "natural resources" connotes a material use for things like trees and rivers as well. These are far from neutral terms that fail to encompass the diversity of human experience with the natural world.

What about ordinary people in developing countries?—the ones some academics idealize, considering them in harmony with nature, while others blame them for their ignorance and misuse of the environment (Agrawal 1997). They are the target population non-governmental organizations often try to "help" or change by imposing their projects and technology on them, ignoring their priorities, culture, and social organization. Ordinary people do not live according to five-year plans but are constantly adapting to changes in the environment and economy that affect how they provide for their family and what they put on the table. How could I come close to understanding how they experience the natural environment in their everyday lives? I had to depart from the standard academic approach to environmental studies if I wanted to include the contradictory, often irrational, and emotional aspects of the human experience, as well as women's spaces and everyday lives.

The disconnect between the discourse of environmental groups, government entities, and academics, on one hand, and the reality of people's lives on the other, was sorely evident in my own sites. Though the United Nations and the international scientific community may recognize Xochimilco's unique system of canals and wetland agriculture, the canal in my back yard was fed by open sewers and my *barrio* had one of the highest rates of infant mortality around Mexico City when my children were born there in the eighties (Figure 47). Watching a small entourage of neighbors carry a little white coffin out of the *callejón* was a painful and all too common experience. Despite the sign that now greeted cars leaving the *periférico* or beltway that encircled the city just before

the new *Parque Ecológico* built on local cornfields, it was evident that Xochimilco was anything but a *paraíso ecológico* or ecological paradise.

In fact, I never heard anyone use the word *ecológico* in my neighborhood except as a joke. Neither had I heard people there refer to the environment or natural resources in generic terms, but rather to their canals or chinampas. People knew the names of the birds, plants and amphibians—as well as the varieties of beans—many of which they had not seen in over a decade. Their language included a sensuality and emotion that spoke to an acute awareness of the life around them, a sense of being a part of it, of having a hand in the loss that was evident today, and of outrage at the city taking their water and returning only sewage. My neighbors were sad when they told stories about the clean water they once drank from canals so transparent they could see a coin on the bottom. Women remembered seeing their plates or spoons sink to the bottom if they dropped them while washing dishes. They recalled when their grandfathers, fathers, and husbands caught fish and the women prepared them in *tlapiques,* or fish tamales. Now they bought fish from Tampico at the market to make the local specialty, because, they told me, fish from the canals were not only scarce but tasted like mud and only the very poorest ate them.

Their stories, like those of Mexican migrant women around Austin whom I interviewed during a pilot project, always referred to sensual and emotional interactions with nature: the joy of seeing a flower blossom, the smell of rain, the moistness of soil on their hands, the pleasure of roasting corn after a harvest, or the excitement of drawing honey from the maguey. Often they erupted in

laughter, sometimes their faces darkened with grief, others their fists tightened with anger.

Geographer Yi Fu Tuan calls the sense of sight the coolest and least emotional of the senses, one that presents a physical and psychological distance, an "aesthetic distance" between the spectator and that which he beholds. For my neighbors in Xochimilco, as for my research informants, *la naturaleza* – "nature"—had many more dimensions than a glossy photo on an REI catalog: it had a smell, a feel, a taste. It was not something they interpreted on a written page. It was life itself. It was something they sunk their hands and teeth into, much like the young single mothers I spoke with in Morelos who worked the fields with their children. These women did not know how to respond to my questions when I used the term *medioambiente,* or "environment." Then they recalled a schoolteacher from Cuernavaca who had come to the local rural school and had wanted to teach the children *educación ambiental* [environmental education]. She took the class out for a field day or *día de campo* to learn about the environment. The women recalled that she had specifically asked mothers to send a pack lunch with their kids. They laughed heartily as they told the story, mystified as to what the *maestra* would teach the young *campesinos* about the *campo.* I left wondering what they could teach me.

Finally, the choice of kitchenspace as a research site was also a strategic one. In my pilot project around Austin, I had learned that as long as I asked women about environment, ecology, or natural resources, they would refer me to their husbands. This was particularly frustrating because in every case it was the

women who were responsible for planting fruit trees, herbs and other plants, and raising goats, rabbits or chickens in the immediate vicinity of their house. These women drew on networks of *comadres* to obtain seeds from home so they could have the peach trees or flowers they wanted. They did everything they could to reproduce the landscape and flavor of their homeland in Texas, sometimes asking their husband to build a special outdoor oven so they could prepare certain foods in culturally appropriate ways.

In order to incorporate women's experience with their natural environment and nature in their everyday lives, I had to readjust my parameters to keep women at the center of my study, in part because they were not accustomed to representing themselves as experts or being spokespersons for their household or community. I reoriented my questions to focus on the specific area of expertise that women recognized as their domain. This allowed me to hone in on a gendered and neglected view of the environment, concluding the study with a "nature in the kitchen" approach. My focus on food preparation was a strategy that I later found effective legitimizing my introduction to women in semi-rural communities outside Mexico City and in Morelos, and initiating conversations about nature in more domestic terms.

FEMINIST LITERATURE REVIEW

My work explores an area of interest to geographers since the early days of the discipline: How do humans inhabit the earth? As early as 1864, George Perkins Marsh drew geographers' attention to the importance of understanding

humans' relationship with the environment (Marsh 1974 [1984]). Today, few geographers have taken this to the gendered spaces of everyday life. In a twist to the traditional approach to *man-land* relations, my work addresses a gender imbalance in geography (Monk and Hanson 1982, Seager 1992) and in environmental studies. The importance of gender has been stressed by feminist geographers and others carrying out multidisciplinary research in the area of women and development (Momsen 1991, Harcourt 1994) as well as environment and conservation (Rocheleau 1988; Rocheleau, Ross, Morrobel, Brito, Amparo, and Hernandez 1994; Rocheleau and Thomas-Slayter 1995; Sundberg 1998, 1999). In her work on non-governmental organizations in the Petén in Guatemala, Juanita Sundberg (1999) noted that the narratives of international conservation organizations working in the region excluded women, privileged men as agents, and in effect erased history. Despite a series of ongoing obstacles and challenges, the last ten years have seen progress among Latin Americanist geographers understanding how gender and space are intertwined (Schroeder 2002). My research aims to contribute a concrete, empirical case study to this area of work by bringing a new perspective to the details and spaces of everyday life.

Women are at the center of my inquiry because in my sites, as in many developing world contexts, they are responsible for managing natural resources in the domestic sphere (Rocheleau and Thomas-Slayter 1995), preparing food for their families and larger community, and transmitting cultural values regarding the environment to younger generations (Keys 1999, Kimber 1966, Schroeder 1990). Research has shown that women's role in the gendered household space is

vitally important both to their welfare and the transmission of culture (Friedman 1992), particularly in the case of indigenous women (Arizpe 1988). This is particularly relevant today as women lose space in the household with their increasing participation in the market economy and less rigid divisions between public and private spheres.

From an interest in gender and nature/society relations, I undertook a literature review of feminist geography, exploring theoretical approaches and case studies in three different areas: 1) embodiment; 2) women's narratives; and 3) gendered spaces. The location or site of my particular interests, from a feminist geography perspective, begins with the embodied experience of a gendered and active subject. It is located within the sphere of social reproduction in both semi-public and private spaces but with particular emphasis on what is generally considered domestic space: homes, gardens, and kitchens. In the more traditional sense of the term geographic, I am interested in the perspectives and experiences from developing countries in the south—Mexico in particular—often left out of feminist academic discourse dominated by perspectives from northern, industrialized nations.

The literature search led me to a series of interconnected concepts including the gendered body and landscape; ethnographic and historical approaches to "writing culture" or "writing women's lives"; and social reproduction. While the bulk of the literature I explored is from geographers working on these concepts, because of the interdisciplinary nature of the issues, many references included come from the fields of anthropology, sociology,

history and culture studies, and to a lesser extent fields concerned with environment and development such as economics and political science.

As a starting point, I began with a series of articles and books reviewing the contributions of feminist geographers to the discipline and the visibility of women and gender in geographic research: Bondi (1990), Domosh (1991), Hanson (1992), Jones (1997), Katz (1993), Katz and Monk (1993), Kobayashi (1997), McDowell (1992 a and b; 1993 a and b; 1999), McDowell and Massey (1984), Monk (1984, 1992, 1996, 1997, Nast (1994), Peet (1998), (1996), Monk and Hanson (1982), Seager (1985, 1987, 1992), and Rose (1993, 1995). As in other fields, feminists in geography have worked to make women visible and to question methodological approaches to the production of knowledge and propose alternatives. McDowell (1999) points out that by 1999, cross-fertilization has occurred between geography and other disciplines whereby key geographical concepts such as space, place, and displacements are found throughout feminist scholarship. Schroeder (2002) reviews the contributions and challenges facing Latin Americanist geographers with gender as a major research agenda, finding that many of these are engaged in wider debates but often find more acceptance of their work outside the discipline.

Suggesting that the structure and practice of geography is particularly masculinist (Rose 1993), Cosgrove calls geography a "hairy chested discipline" (in Cosgrove and Domosh, 1993). Scientific methodological approaches to knowledge production based on the Enlightenment ideals of disembodied knowledge and the Cartesian dualisms of mind/body, culture/nature, have been

criticized by feminists inside geography (England 1994; Harding 1991; Nast 1994; Rose 1993, 1996) and outside the field (Bordo 1986; Butler 1990 1993; Keller 1985; hooks 1994; Merchant 1980).

Feminism as a political movement initiated popular concern on the body as related to reproduction and women's rights (Davis 1997). As early as 1949 Simone de Beauvoir had made the famous statement that "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman," raising the issue of sex vs. gender, or biology vs. social construction. The theme of difference, with all the controversies related to essentialism, and of sex/gender were to remain at the center of much theorizing on the body by feminists in the late 1980s and through the 1990s: Bordo (1989, 1993); Butler (1990, 1993); Csordas (1990, 1994); Haraway (1991, 1996); Jacobus (1990); Jaggar (1990); Keller (1985); Leder (1990); Locke (1993); Grosz (1991, 1993, 1994); Griffin (1999). Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, called "post-feminists" by Davis (1997), have questioned the category of women altogether. Geographer Linda McDowell (1999) recommends a focus on gender relations.

Despite a focused interest in the body by anthropologists since the 1970s, it was not until 1990 that the field took an interest in embodiment, or a "radical role for the body" (Csordas 1994). Perhaps the most exciting work on embodiment today is coming out of medical anthropology. Theorists with particular interest in embodiment as an empowering approach to bridging the subject/object dichotomy include Csordas (1990, 1994); Davis (1997); Haraway (1991, 1996); and Young (1990).

Geographers were slow to take interest in the body (Longhurst 1995, 1997; Massey 1994; Nast 1996; Rose 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997), and significantly it is the body and not embodiment that has become the primary focus. This is perhaps due to the fact that geographers—until very recently (Bondi et al. 2002)—seem to be approaching the body as a site or place, like the home, that is increasingly considered an important area for analyzing social interactions. Haraway's (1991, 1996) notion of situated knowledge and positionality may well serve as a theoretical bridge to embodied experience as well as place for geographers.

At the intersection of space and body is much recent literature on kitchen and food: Buckley (1996); Curtin (1992); Lenz (1999); Lorde (1992); Lupton (1994); May (1996); Pilcher (1998); Schroeder (1990); Shapiro (1986); Sparke (1995); Thomasson (1992) and of course Mintz (1996, 1999, 2000). Of particular interest to me are the works of Greenberg (1996) on Yucatec immigrant house-lots, Madge (1994) on food collection in the Gambia, and Vizcarra Bordi's work on the *taco mazahua* as a space of social resistance (2000).

There is also a solid literature on difference by feminist geographers focusing on gendered landscapes and women's narratives about the landscape (Kolodny 1975, 1984; Norwood and Monk 1987; Monk 1984, 1992). Ethnography as a feminist method has also been discussed by geographers (Dyck 1993; Katz 1992, 1993; Katz with Kirby 1991; Valentine 1999). However, I believe geographers have a lot to learn from feminist ethnographers in the field of

anthropology and history such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990a and b, 1991, 1993) and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (1991).

Within the context of the geographical concept of "space," and sometimes the feminist concern over the public/private space dichotomy, much interesting discussion has occurred within geography on the importance of domestic space and everyday life. From Clarissa T. Kimber's work on gardens in Martinique (1966) to Eric Keys work on Kaqchikel Gardens in Guatemala (1999), geographers have long showed interest in private or domestic space. (See also Arizpe 1989; Brú-Bistuer 1996; Lowe 1995; Oberhauser 1997; Seager 1987; and Valentine 1999). The concept of social reproduction (Katz 1991; Merchant 1990; Turner 1994) also validates a focus on domestic or private space.

It is Rocheleau's focus on gendered spaces in the landscape and the feminist political ecology (FPE) approach that I found particularly useful in my work (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Edmunds 1995; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). Calling for the "inclusion of a gender-based analysis of how spaces and places are used, valued and struggled over in specific cultures" with an aim to protecting women's source of income and livelihood, Rocheleau points out that men and women can have dramatically different relationships to particular resources (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Edmunds 1995). While her intention is more overtly political than my own, with a focus on struggles for access or power, an adaptation of this approach and the overall concept of gendered spaces and gendered differences in uses and knowledge of natural resources in daily life are at the foundation of my approach to women's cultural

perception and use of spaces associated with food gathering and preparation. The FPE conceptual approach is also appropriate because it transcends the dichotomies between rural and urban environments and industrial and agrarian settings, linking local to global issues. It provides a framework for me to situate rural traditions within increasingly urban settings, and to address domestic space and cooking as a site of resistance, as well as everyday life as a source of knowledge of environment. The abundance of kitchen and cooking elements that pervade the text (1996), despite the diversity of cases it includes, confirmed to me that the theme was ripe with symbolic and social importance for an analysis of both culture and environment.

Finally, I must say that while the feminist literature does reflect a diversity of experience, it is still dominated by issues and places of little concern to the majority of women in the world. The methodological concern with the self and reflexivity is often carried to the extreme of excluding an understanding of people and places other than the researcher and his or her origin (Nagar 1997). And yet while the challenging and contradictory nature of living on this earth is often difficult for academics living among the privileged in wealthy countries to comprehend, plenty of feminists are contributing to a geographic knowledge that reflects just that diversity (Kobayashi 1994, 1997; Mohanty 1991; Momsen 1987, 1991; Rocheleau et al. 1996; Sabaté 1992; Shiva 1988, 1992; Visweswaran 1994).

SECTION TWO: BEING IN KITCHENSPACE,

THE HOUSE-LOT GARDEN

Food plays a vital role in the ceremonies celebrating life and seasonal transitions in my communities. Women work collectively to prepare special dishes for community *fiestas* revolving around representations of religious figures—such as the local patron saint, the Virgin Mary, or the baby Jesus—, family celebrations such as weddings or *quinceañeras*,[16] or special meals marking the corn harvest. Often, the women sit in a circle around a table or a sack of dried chilies or hibiscus flowers for hours, chatting and joking as they work.

The final stage of food preparation follows up on months or years of accumulating necessary resources—by planting crops or raising animals, stockpiling ingredients, saving money, and obtaining formal *promesas* or commitments from the extended social network to share in the expense. This final period of intensive work can extend over several days or even weeks, and involves various tiers of meals in addition to the principal *comida* around which the women's organization revolves.

The *promesas* and other aspects of the fiestas serve to link my communities with others in their region as they exchange *promesas* in support of each others'celebrations and form part of an elaborate and traditional *cargo*

[16] A quinceañera is a big celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday marking her transition into womanhood and coming out in society. It is a very formal, codified event, including music and dance where the girl wears a special dress often resembling a wedding gown.

system. Often these promises consist of receiving a pilgrimage with food or bringing fireworks, candles, or, in the case of Tetecala, *gigantonas* for the parade. In Xochimilco, where there is not one day of the year that some saint or other religious figure is not the center of a collective celebration, fiestas clearly form part of everyday life. Even in places that do not have such a hectic rhythm of celebration, however, these mark the calendar and communal social life and require extensive organization and preparation throughout the year. The day after a celebration in Ocotepec, for instance, members of the barrio's *junta directiva* or council meet to make plans for next year, writing down specific commitments and names, and reading aloud the names of those who contributed to the fiesta just concluding. Called the *recalentado* in this town, or "reheated," a meal made of the principal fiesta's leftovers is a key component of this event. Among other things, the list compiled that day includes who will be responsible for the meal provided to the musicians the next year, and who will feed certain visiting groups or special guests.

The *cargo* system in indigenous communities in Mexico and its relation with traditional fiestas and cosmovision has been amply studied (Aguirre Beltrán 1991 [1953]; Broda 1971, 1982, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993 y con Báez-Jorge 2001; Cancian 1976; Korsbaek 1996; Medina 1987; Neurath 1993, 2000; Padilla Pineda 2000; Sepúlveda y Herrera 1974; Torres 1994; Villa Rojas 1947). Focusing on political and religious *cargos*, these studies tend to focus on men's role in these positions. Given the importance of food for the ceremonial cycle and collective identity, and the gendered aspects of its celebration, it is important to

study women's role in food preparation for these events, not only the *mayordomas* who take on formal responsibilities in this area but the groups of women who support her in seeing it through. Good Eshelman's (2001b) paper on ritual food seems to be a first step in this direction. It is clear, and was echoed in different words by many of my informants, that without these women, whom I call the women of the circle, collective celebrations—be they the more sacred fiestas centered on religious figures or the family celebrations of a wedding or quinceaños—would not have the meaning or form we encounter today.

Chapter Four: Fiestas and the House-lot Garden, Xochimilco

> *"El Niñopa…sagrado infante, sincretizado desde hace casi 500 años, con Huitzilopochtli niño. Su nombre tiene dos significaciones: Niño Padre, or Niño del lugar. Elaborado con manos indígenas en madera de colorín, el culto del NiñoPa original dio inicio en una capellanía de Xochimilco, fundada por un cacique indio llamado Martín Cortés Alvarado, apoderado El Viejo. Desde entonces, se le continúa adornado (sic.) por ser un Niño Dios muy milagroso, cuya fiesta principal es el 2 de febrero, Día de la Candelaría, cuando cambia de mayordomo que lo ha de cuidar en su casa todo un año."*
>
> ["The Niñopa…holy infant, syncretized 500 years ago with the child version of Huitzilopochtli.[17] His name has two meanings: Child Father, or Child of the place. Made by indigenous hands out of *colorín* wood, the cult to the Niñopa originally began in a Xochimilco chapel founded by an Indian cacique called Martín Cortés Alvarado, know as the Old Man. Since then, he has continued to be adored for being a very miraculous baby Jesus, whose principal fiesta is February 2nd, day of the Candelaria, when he changes *mayordomo* or host who must take care of him in his house for an entire year."] (Exhibit, Museum of Popular Cultures, Coyoacán, México, D.F. 11/24/00.)

Nothing represents Xochimilco more, or brings as many people together to share a meal there, than the Niñopa, the "child of the place". A central figure that permeates the everyday lives of many Xochimilcas, the Niñopa is the most venerated and *miraculous* of several baby Jesus figures in the community, often referred to as the *sagrada imagen* or sacred image.[18] A wooden statue representing the baby Jesus, the Niñopa is treated like a live child, harkening to

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[17] Aztec god of war, protector of the mother.

[18] Xochimilcas refer to the figures as just that, using the word *imagen*. Several times people pointed out to me that, despite the emotion and celebration I observed, people were clear that the figures were only representations of Jesus or Mary. I believe this reflected the renewed efforts of the Catholic church to curb the veneration of relics that are often the source of criticism by the increasingly present Protestant churches.

prehispanic religious beliefs despite the devout Catholicism of his followers. Stories of his mischief as well as his legendary miracles abound, and his appearance produces intense emotion among his followers. Everywhere in Xochimilco, the Niñopa is received with love, intense devotion, fireworks, flowers, and food. People say that his image brings good fortune to those who visit him, pray to him, bring him gifts, or simply carry a photograph of his likeness. On the Niñopa's daily processions, the figure is always shielded from the sun and the rain (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Taking the Niñopa home

The oral tradition surrounding the Niñopa reflects Xochimilco's history of resistance to religious and political authorities that dates back to the pre-colonial era when the Xochimilcas were forced to produce food and flowers for the Aztec empire. Later, Spanish tax collectors complained about locals contributing little to their coffers while they nonetheless exhibited great wealth in their lavish fiestas. The Niñopa is said to have survived the years of repression of religious activity during the *Guerra de los Cristeros* in the period following the Mexican Revolution thanks to the people hiding and protecting him. A legal struggle with the Catholic Church in the mid 1970's concluded with the Niñopa receiving the status of Mexican citizen. He was provided with a lawyer and bank account. Celebrations in Xochimilco grew, with people protecting him from the threat of the Church by guarding and venerating him in their homes.

> *"El padre se lo quería robar. El niño nunca ha estado en la iglesia. Hubo un juico y el Lic. Fernando Arenas ganó—y de ahí se enriquecieron las tradiciones—pues se estableció que si se dejaba de venerar la iglesia lo recoje."*
>
> ["The priest wanted to steal him. The Niñopa has never lived in the church, but after the court case in which he was represented by a local lawyer and granted the status of Mexican citizen, it was established that if people stopped worshipping him the church would take him."] (Interview 23/7/01)

The Niñopa is the most loved religious figure of Xochimilco, one with whom nearly every family claims association. Everyone seems to recall stories told by an aunt or a grandparent who once hosted him in their home, and tells them eagerly as one might relate an anecdote about the distant childhood of a favorite grandson. Indeed, in many ways, the Niñopa is treated like family, though respected like a god.

The list of people waiting to host him—future *mayordomos*—extends over thirty years into the future. While extremely costly, serving as the Niñopa's godparents for the year, or even for a day or a morning, brings great honor to the family in charge and is celebrated by surrounding barrios as well as the Niñopa's devout followers—some who come from as far as the southern state of Oaxaca to venerate him. His worshippers often bring gifts and are traditionally received with something to eat and drink.

The celebration of the Niñopa and the responsibility that the *mayordomos* take for ensuring the appropriate veneration for the year requires the support of an extensive network of *comadres*, *compadres*, and neighbors to support the host family. The host, or *mayordomos*—generally a couple with the support of a family and barrio—keep the small, hand-carved wooden figure in their home for a year. They enjoy a position of status among neighbors, religious and lay officials that comes with the responsibility for assuring that the baby is safe and worshipped according to tradition. The hosts must welcome admirers who visit the *sagrado infante* or *holy child* and must offer a rosary (prayer) every night.

The rosary is always followed by a small but symbolic snack in a ritual that resembles the holy communion of the Catholic Church, though corn tamales or perhaps wheat cookies or bread replace the host. "*Lo que uno pueda dar"* [whatever you can offer], people say, meaning that you are welcome to worship the Niñopa regardless of your economic means. In fact, what the host serves at the various Niñopa ceremonies throughout the 365 days of the year is always the subject of public scrutiny, as are the other components of the highly ritualized

celebrations that Xochimilcas have come to expect and that have grown in size and lavishness and become increasingly expensive over the years.

Besides protection and a nightly rosary, the *mayordomo's* responsibilities include hosting a special Mass at least once a month, including February 2 and Christmas; celebrating the *posadas* that occur nightly from December 16 through the 24, maintaining the belongings of the *imagen* or image in good shape and turning them over to the following *mayordomos* when the time comes; and giving the Niñopa to the new *mayordomo* "without any opposition" (Orta Hernández 1991: 118)

Once a year, after the change of *mayordomo* on February 2, with the help of a committee composed of past and future *mayordomos*, the Niñopa's legal representative must make sure the Niñopa's extensive and ever-growing inventory of belongings—clothes, toys, furniture, jewelry—is passed on to the new *mayordomo*. Once a future *mayordomo* is put on a waiting list, he or she and their family begin the preparations and accumulations required to receive the Niñopa, sometimes building a new house to receive him, as well as raising animals and planting corn for the special meal with which he is received in his new home.

While the *mayordomos* have a great and costly responsibility, and enhance their status because of this role, the work, cost, joy, and honor are shared throughout the year to some extent by the family and community members that contribute to the care and celebration of the *santo niño.* With food a necessary accompaniment to his veneration, often, families contribute part of the food that is

prepared or distributed at Niñopa events. Many women work together with the *mayordoma* to prepare and distribute meals for given celebrations.

While a family's prestige is on the line when they host a fiesta which is open to all—as is the case during the feasts given in the name of popular religious icons such as the Niñopa, the *Virgen de Xaltocán*, and the Niño de Belén, for instance—the entire barrio is also judged by the decorations, fireworks, and food. The men organize to clean the streets, hang colored lights and streamers, and sometimes even paint the outside of the neighborhood houses in preparation, while the women from the host barrio and the hostess' social networks come together to prepare the food.

At the principal annual event on February 2, when the current *mayordomos* relinquish the Niñopa to the next ones, the latter announce the *posaderos* and barrios that will offer the traditional *posadas* during the Christmas celebrations. According to my informants, the *mayordomos* must agree upon their *posaderos* at least ten years in advance. While the hosts offer the general public a delicious, traditional meal on the *Día de la Candelaria* (February 2), the posaderos are treated as special guests and often served a slightly different menu. In 2001 the posadero's were given a basket with special additional food to take home after the collective meal—including a special batch of *mole* prepared for the occasion.

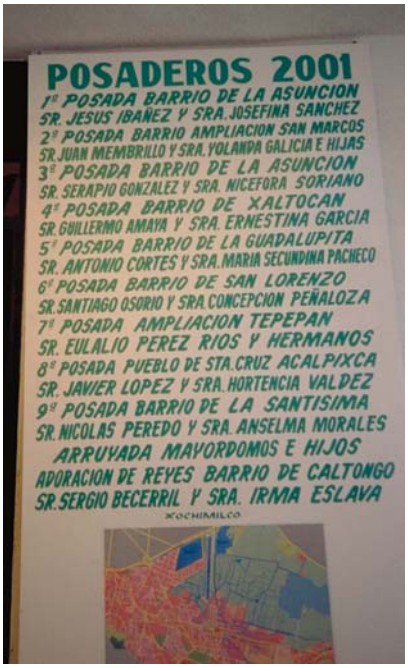

Figure 26: The Niñopa's upcoming host families and barrios (list and map)

Not surprisingly, given the weight of the hosts' responsibility and the importance of the Niñopa to the community, the committee that determines whether or not to allow a potential host onto the list studies the possibility of family support in case of unexpected setback (Figure 26). In one recent case, two unmarried sisters who petitioned to be future *mayordomas* were denied on the basis of not having family to fall back on if they were unable to fulfill the commitment. I was told there had been no known instances where the *mayordomos* had failed in the past. Recently, the unexpected death of the couple that was due to be at the head of a future year-long commitment as hosts, and whose children were underage at the time of their death, led to a switch between families on the list. This gave the orphans more years to prepare to carry out their parents' promise, rendered even more important in light of the tragedy.

In addition to the key celebrations on February 2 and the posadas preceding Christmas, the Niñopa is hosted by a different family from a barrio of Xochimilco nearly every day of the year. On rare occasions—and with special permission and protection—a family from a nearby town outside of Xochimilco may borrow him for the day. Regardless if who hosts him for the day, taking him

home to a private and elaborate celebration with family, friends and neighbors after the daily morning Mass, he must be back in time for the evening rosary at his—i.e. his *mayordomos'*—house. Wherever he is, admirers are welcome to visit, bring him gifts, and pray. They may kiss the hem of his dress, though they are not allowed to touch his body. The sick are allowed to take home the cotton that is used to wipe the baby's face in the morning toilette routine and which are said to have curative powers.

The participants of the nightly rosary are invited to eat and drink after praying the rosary and singing the *arrullada* or nursery songs. People line up to kiss the baby's holy garment as he is held in the arms of his host and then file outdoors to form another line for the *atole* and tamales or bread and coffee. Participation in this final closing ceremony while the baby is being put to bed is important; often people who are not hungry or thirsty still go through the line and take the special offering home to eat and drink later or to share with someone who was not able to attend, or who is ill and believes in the Niñopa's healing powers. All or part of the *merienda* or snack may be offered by a special *mayordomo* who takes responsibility for the tamales or the milk or the rosary on a given night—often the family who *borrowed* him for the day. This provides the opportunity for others to share the honor, the expense, and—presumably—the protection that the miraculous child bestows.

People bring flowers, or other gifts for the sacred infant. *"La imagen recompensa"* [the image rewards you], my informants agreed. Among the legendary stories told of the Niñopa, many credit him with saving the life of

someone who was involved in a potentially fatal accident either on their way to visit him, or when carrying a photograph or other relic with them: one man was thrown from his car on the road to Xochimilco but emerged without a scratch, thanks to the Niñopa's divine intervention. Another man whose chinampas were kept safe from the thieves that plague many farmers in Xochimilco attributed this to his prayers to the Niñopa. (Interview 23/7/01.)

After the rosary ceremony, the Niñopa is dressed for bed and retired to his crib. In the morning, when the *mayordoma* goes to his crib side to wash his face and dress him for the day, she often reports finding his toys and marbles strewn around on the ground. Legend has it that the Niñopa likes to play with his toys in the night and that he particularly enjoys going out on the canals to see the flowers traditionally cultivated on the chinampas from his own little *trajinera* (Figure 27).[19]

Figure 27: Arch depicting canal and Niñopa on *trajinera*

[19] This canoe-like vessel is used by people to get around the canals that weave throughout Xochimilco, in particular to get to the chinampas to work and to bring in the harvest in. Like the Niñopa, it is a symbol of Xochimilco. Thanks to several old Mexican movies and modern soap operas, Xochimilco and its trajineras are known to a popular audience throughout the country and beyond.

In the change of the *mayordomía* for the Niñopa on February 2, 2001, the main meal of the day was served to over five thousand followers. At one point, a woman was sent to pick up the one hundred kilos of tortillas pre-ordered at the *tortillería*; later somebody else had to go for more. While the Niñopa is a particularly venerated figure, the festivities surrounding his image are but one example of the integration of daily life and fiesta in Xochimilco, as well as of the synergy of indigenous agricultural celebrations with Catholic images. Most people in the community and visitors from outside the community experience these celebrations from the table. The experience always includes food and drink.

"Xochimilco, ¡siempre de fiesta!" ["Xochimilco, always celebrating!"] reads the local government's tourist slogan. It is indeed practically impossible to spend a day or night in Xochimilco and not hear fireworks. Flor, my informant and neighbor, chuckles, saying: *"Aquí en Xochimilco le faltan días para celebrar sus fiestas."* ["Here in Xochimilco, the place is short on days to celebrate all its fiestas."] (Interview 23/7/01.) Many of the local celebrations involve walking the streets with *imágenes peregrinas* [pilgrim images] but include gathering just outside somebody's home to eat. While the Niñopa is arguably the most popular or venerated sacred figure, *el Niño de Belén* or the child from Bethlehem is another very important Jesus figure; a particular favorite in the barrio that shares his name, this "child" is loved by Xochimilcas throughout the town. As evidence of the lack of animosity between the two, or their followers, several people in the barrio pointed out a recent event when a neighbor held a joint party for the two baby Jesus figures.

Beside the Niñopa and the Niño de Belén, another key image in Xochimilco that draws immense and devoted crowds and includes a special meal is the *Virgen de Xaltocán.* Associated with one particular neighborhood—in this case the *barrio de Xaltocán,* where she is said to have appeared to a *campesino* returning from the chinampas in his canoe—like the Niño de Belén, she is venerated throughout the community and celebrated by Xochimilcas every day during an entire month. This is in addition to several celebrations before and after that period that are part of the community's preparations for the current and next year's fiesta. Events include the announcement of the *promesas* and *mayordomos* for the next year, where people commit to providing anything from the tortillas or flowers for a given day to a *comida* or meal, the music, or fireworks. Most of the religious processions end up in a yard where a group of women have prepared traditional food in honor of the *imagen* and where the followers are welcome to share the feast.

Traditional foods such as *mole* and tamales are synonymous with folk fiestas in central Mexico, and Xochimilco is no exception. Niñopa traditions are supported to a great extent by the women who gather together to make adequate culinary preparations for a community event of stature. Often behind the scenes, always in the house-lot garden, the women who I consider the *retaguardia* or rearguard spend countless hours and sometimes weeks working to prepare drinks and food for guests. By providing a description of some of the steps leading up to and including this celebration, I hope to communicate somewhat of a sense of Xochimilco in one particular context where food and faith are woven together.

El Niñopa has his own fireworks. November 24, 2000.

"Aquí, si no lo despiertan los gallos lo despiertan los cohetes," says Señora Rosa, as she listens to me complain about the blasts that woke me up at 7 a.m. ["Here, if the roosters do not wake you the fireworks will."] Between the amplified dance music that often drifts across the canals as late as three in the morning, and the fireworks and church bells that go off before morning Mass, sleeping in this town takes some getting used to.

I am sitting at the table in my neighbor's kitchen; she stands over her stove preparing my eggs with *nopales*. Hot tortillas, wrapped in an embroidered napkin, are piled high in a basket in front of me, a jar of salt and one of canned jalapeños beside it. She apologizes for not having fresh salsa.

The sound of fireworks this morning was immediately followed by the familiar notes of a traditional brass band. Half asleep, I ran up on top of my flat roof or *azotea* to watch the procession slowly make its way out of the *callejón* towards the local chapel that marks the entrance to the alley that is my neighborhood. Looking down, I saw the swirling capes of the *chinelos* or masked dancers that accompany most religious processions in Xochimilco, spinning and hopping in energetic yet drunken-like movement. They were taking the Niñopa to Mass. The rear was brought up by the *cohetero*, a man using his cigarette to light one long bottle rocket after another, sending them whistling up towards the heavens. Fireworks are part of the celebration in every fiesta in Xochimilco. This morning, Señora Rosa informs me that the *Niñopa's* fireworks have a particular

softer sound that differentiate it from all others and that alerts his followers to his presence.

Chinelos

The dancing *chinelos* are a key ingredient in Xochimilco celebrations. Some say the tradition of *chinelos* came to Xochimilco from Tlayacapan in the early part of the 20th century, when the indigenist movement brought representatives from that nearby community to Milpa Alta, just outside of Xochimilco, for political meetings. Others are adamant that the dancers diffused from Tepoztlán, a place more often frequented by Xochimilcas today and well known for a tradition of fiestas very similar to Xochimilco's that includes *chinelos*, fireworks, and *mole*. Perhaps both are correct, as there appear to be slightly different styles of dress that may reflect a difference in temperature or of wealth between the two villages, one made of cool, cotton weave or *manta* and one of thick, rich velvet, the latter being adopted in Xochimilco. In any case, everyone agrees that the *chinelos* came from Morelos and that they are here to stay.

Figure 28:
Chinelitos

The chinelos, like the fireworks, entice young people to participate in community traditions. Each year, little boys and girls are anxious to wear their striking chinelo outfit—made from crushed velvet—for the first time (Figure 28). Hopping up and down on the street alongside the older dancers, they are exhausted and collected by their mothers after relatively short distances.

According to the local museum in Tlayacapan,[20] the peculiar costume is said to have been designed by *hacienda* laborers from Morelos to poke fun at the extravagant nightgowns used by the wives of the wealthy landowners, mocking them with awkward movements, sounds, ridiculous elbow-length gloves and plumed hats. A mask includes an exaggeratedly pointed beard made of horsetail, and green or blue eyes, both non-Indian traits and ethnic characteristics of the stereotypical Spaniard. Historically, the mask concealed the *mestizo's* identity,

[20] Comisión de Rescate Histórico y Cultural Ex-Convento San Juan Bautista, A.C.

allowing him to ridicule the ruling class and protest labor abuses during the three-day *Carnaval* prior to Ash Wednesday that marked the onset of Lent. The hacienda owners—fearing rebellion—gave their workers these days off to blow off steam without fear of punishment before entering the relative fast and elimination of meat that—according to Catholic tradition—preceded the feasting on Easter Sunday. The mask and *Carnaval*—reminiscent of ancient Venetian carnivals—created a measure of temporary political space for the local population: the wearer would shout or sing insults aimed at the *patrón* in high, falsetto tones, and pin offensive statements to the back of his robe.

Though the three-day carnival is still celebrated in Tlayacapan, and the extensive popular fiestas in Mexico arguably serve as a social safety valve for the poor to eat, drink, and dance their woes away, the chinelo dance is not generally considered a ritual of resistance by participants in Xochimilco, but one of faith. Rather than insults to authorities, the *chinelos* today bear images and sometimes words expressing religious sentiment and showcasing fancy handiwork on their backs. Contemporary designs on the robes reflect the interests and commitments of the wearer, and have changed over time. In a fascinating blend of traditional and popular culture, icons on the Xochimilca's backs this year include imagery of plumed serpents and other Aztec gods, though the favorite Mexican symbol—*la Virgen de Guadalupe*—holds her ground.

Some people purchase a chinelo robe at exorbitant prices; most sew their own, or at least bead and embroider the design on the backs. This includes the teenage boys who often participate in community festivities by joining a

comparza de chinelos—an organized unit that makes a commitment for a specific time period, often to a particular religious icon. A group affiliated with the new *mayordomo*, composed primarily of neighborhood teens—male and female—formed a comparza de *chinelos* to accompany the Niñopa throughout the year that the barrio was host.

Between chinelo robes, *quinceañera* dresses, baptism gowns, and the tortilla napkins and aprons regularly required for different fiestas, Señora Rosa and her sister, Señora Josefina—who has been sewing for money since she was eight—are kept busy year round. Sewing, knitting, making all sorts of *manualidades* [handicrafts] including candles and confetti-filled eggs with the shells that are perpetually being saved in the kitchen—Xochimilco's party tradition provides Señora Rosa's family with important income-generating opportunities. Having apprenticed with a hairdresser from Xochimilco living in the city as a child, Señora Rosa maintains a modest hairdressing business on the side, working from a little wooden room in the back of her house not only cutting and dying hair but often creating fancy hairdos for women attending parties. She also combines hairdressing and sewing skills to create hairpieces for Virgin Mary statues with the cuttings she saves from her clients' hair. While this year she made one for a *virgencita* that a neighbor wanted to take on his annual pilgrimage to a site in the far-away state of Oaxaca, and on other occasions her hairpieces were taken to pilgrimage sites in Puebla and Tlaxcala, most of her hairpieces are worn by little Virgin Marys in Xochimilco homes.

The Barrio

This morning, Señora Rosa tells me the name of the barrio or neighborhood that will host the Niñopa for the day, surprising me once again with how much and how fast she is aware of information on community life from her place in the kitchen. Of course she also collects the latest gossip standing on her front step by the blue wooden door leading into the *callejón*: everyone leaving the neighborhood must pass and those with whom she is on speaking terms stop to say hello and goodbye—*buenas tardes Señora Rosa, buenas tardes*— the women often putting their bags down and cleaning their hands on their aprons before shaking her hand twice in a two-minute encounter. Among the people whom she does not speak with is her mother-in-law. Though she lives at the entrance to the *callejón*, one of Señora Rosa's sons told me he was surprised when he learned years ago as a child that she was his grandmother.

The barrio you are from is one of the most important identity markers here, and certainly the geographic unit to which people belong. There are seventeen traditional barrios, each with its own fiestas and specific traditions, though these in turn celebrate Xochimilco-wide fiestas with other barrios. Xochimilca's also identify each other by last name, often family names associated with a particular barrio. People may participate in celebrations all over town, or marry into a different barrio, but still consider themselves to be from the barrio where they and their grandparents were born. Some of the women I interviewed who lived in the barrio for over thirty years if not fifty surprised me by first clarifying that they were from another barrio in Xochimilco—*soy de San Juan*,

for instance—and had married into the one in which they now resided. When I interviewed a person outside of the *callejón*, Señora Rosa would ask for the person's name and then tell me the barrio their family was from, insisting on the original barrio associated with the family name even if the individual no longer lived there.

Being from one barrio is considered altogether different from being from the one that is across the street. The *sacristán* [priest's assistant who in this case is responsible for community relations] in the Asunción chapel was from Tlacoapa, and lived in a house across the small *plaza de la Asunción* and directly facing the chapel that has always been in his family. The neighbors in la Asunción were very suspicious that he should be involved in their church and community activities instead of his own.

Figure 29: Four virgins carry the Virgin Mary out of the chapel

It probably does not help the sacristan's popularity that his role is in part to try to enforce church policy that seeks to obtain some control over the proliferation of sacred images and the degree of eating and drinking with which they are celebrated, despite his participation as an eating guest at these celebrations. He failed

in his attempt to put an end to the barrio tradition of serving tamales and coffee inside the Asunción chapel on Holy Easter Friday and told me of his futile attempts to convince people in the neighborhood to bring their Holy Crosses, Virgen Marys, and Jesus figures to the chapel for a blessing on their feast day. There was a logistic problem as well as one of doctrine with the priest visiting from *la parroquia* [the parish] as people call the main church in Xochimilco's central plaza a few blocks away wanted to bless them all in a single service on their days of celebration. Instead, he lamented, people insist on having a fiesta in their homes where they can invite guests, serve food and drinks, and hire a *cura chocolate* or fake priest to say a few words in a brief and unofficial ceremony. With the increasingly large number of images,[21] and the many feast days with which Xochimilcas celebrate them, it is logistically impossible for the local parish to meet the demand for a priest's services (Figure 29). At the same time, the Catholic Church was pressured by criticism from the Protestant Church that their flock engaged in idolatry. Despite the proliferation of relic-like images, people I interviewed were always quick to point out to me that the Niñopa or the *virgencita* were only representations of the one and only true Jesus or Mary (Figure 30).

[21] For instance, in 2000 a group of young men had their own Christ figure made in honor of one of their fathers who passed away and began their own tradition of carrying him on their backs to Chalma, a favorite pilgrimage site. As fiestas continue to grow and the barrios become more populated, there have also been cases of a fragmentation of festivities surrounding some images, resulting in more, separate celebrations requiring a special masses and blessing.

Figure 30: Multiple images of the Niñopa in a pile of framed photographs

The barrio also had a reputation for having many young women with a low level of education, according to several daughters of the barrio who had married out. What was most striking to me in all the years that I lived there, however, was how many young people married within the barrio. Señora Rosa's house was perhaps an extreme case, but two young people there (her elder son and her sister's only daughter) were married to a pair of siblings from one end of the *callejón*, while another son and daughter were married to a different pair of siblings from the other end. In each case, the young couples had purchased land on the outskirts of Xochimilco. One of the couples had been building a modest home for over ten years and continued to live in Señora Rosa's house with two daughters who were now teenagers, much to the father's frustration and despite his efforts to save money he earned as a chauffeur in Mexico City.

November 3, 2000. El cohetero, Maestro Agustín Mercado.

With fireworks a key ingredient in community celebrations in Xochimilco, I took the opportunity provided by the close relationship Señora Rosa's son-in-law Antonio has with one of the most important *coheteros* or fireworks experts in town, and visited him in his workshop outside of town, past Milpa Alta (Figure 31). While from Xochimilco the Popocatepetl is only visible towering behind the *catedral* downtown on the few clear days of the year, here the volcano is undeniably the most dramatic part of the landscape. Antonio used to be a part of Don Agustín's crew, and still helps out on occasion. His family will be heavily dependent on Don Agustín for fireworks throughout their year at the head of the Niñopa *mayordomía*.

"No sé lo que es pedir un trabajo" [I do not know what it is to look for work], Don Agustín tells me right off the bat. Son of sons of *coheteros*, he is proud to say that in thirty-five years of making fireworks he has never had to look for jobs. Instead, people come all the way out here to his workshop to contract with him for their parties, or, he says, they call his house in Santa Ursula, Coyoacán at 2 a.m. to find him home. His workshop used to be in Coyoacán as well, inside Mexico City and not far from Xochimilco, until an accident blew it up, killing his wife and several other relatives. Authorities then forced his shop out of the crowded city area. Today *No smoking* signs are painted on the workshop exterior.

Figure 31: Don Agustín, *el cohetero,* at his shop

Known not only for his superior fireworks but also for producing spectacular hues of purple and orange—which he says are hard to produce due to a scarcity of the necessary materials—Don Agustín benefits from having a daughter who is a chemical engineer and provides him with access to many of the chemicals he needs. A kind and gentle man, his face shows burn scars around his neck; his hands are peeling from constant exposure to gunpowder. His knowledge includes the periodic table that he manipulates to produce the colors in his displays and to which he refers frequently during our conversation. In addition, he knows how to create all kinds of *castillos* or castles*, toros* or bulls, and other structures that require artistic creativity as well as engineering knowledge: the transportable parts are often assembled in the barrio's public plaza in front of the chapel or other open area by lifting the wooden components with a pulley and connecting them with ropes.

Don Agustín's crew includes young men and women who work with their hands around the clock as deadlines approach, packing seemingly endless

amounts of gunpowder into little tubes. Then they throw their entire bodies into the assembly process on-site, sometimes wrapping the ropes around themselves and leaning into them to stop the wind from blowing the *castillo* over before it is lit. He tells me that fathers trust him with their daughters but sometimes he has to send them home when they start wanting too much freedom.

Don Agustín is proud of his sons, three of whom took his profession. Two are on their own and specialize in different kinds of *bombas* or bombs, while his youngest—a teenager—works with him packing the small *cohetes* or fireworks that are wired together to form larger structures. This son, as well as one of the older ones, is an excellent illustrator, drawing the figures that they then sculpt out of wire and gunpowder. While his creations have been featured all over the world, including the Panoramic Studios in Los Angeles, the Olympic games in Barcelona, and the Carnaval at Río de Janeiro, Don Agustín claims he always turns down invitations to travel. He says he is usually too busy preparing fireworks displays for traditional Mexican communities such as Xochimilco.

"Why do people like cohetes so much in Mexico?" I ask him. "*Es un complemento que si no lo llevan a la fiesta, no es fiesta—como una posada sin cacahuates o la feria del mole sin mole"* ["It is a complement that if you do not take it to the party it is not a party—like a posada without peanuts or the *Mole* Fair without the *mole*"],[22] he laughs, his eyes twinkling. He takes the opportunity

[22] *La Feria del Mole* is an annual fair celebrated in San Pedro, in nearby Milpa Alta, which draws merchants who sell mole of many different varieties that visitors can sample as well, as well as traditional clay pots and eating wear that are commonly used in the region for fiestas and everyday cooking and eating. San Pedro is well known for its quality mole and many local families prepare it year round to sell as powder or paste, or prepare it in fine restaurants that generally offer exquisite *tamales de frijol* or bean tamales and in a variety of ways year round. Like several other villages in this region, their economy was boosted by promoting and commercializing a specific

to invite me to several upcoming events in Xochimilco for which he is preparing fireworks—some for pay, others as a gift—including the annual pilgrimage to *La Villa* to visit the *Virgen de Guadalupe*.[23]

Don Agustín and Antonio laugh heartily recalling the failed attempts of a recent head of local government–*la delegada*—to apply a 25% tax on the amount of money Xochimilcas paid for fireworks three years ago. When the people refused, the delegate retaliated by refusing police support for the processions. The party went on without them, with *mayordomos* organizing their own crews to control traffic and keep order among the large number of people that join in the processions through the streets towards the site hosting the fiesta. I laughed too, telling them about a similar situation I found reflected in colonial documents I was perusing in the *Archivo de Indias* in Seville, where Spanish authorities in the 1600s complained about the large and expensive fiestas that the Xochimilca's were regularly hosting and the difficulty the tax collectors had extracting even a portion of that wealth.

"What kind of money and quantities are we talking about?" I want to know, looking for some quantitative indicators to measure the proportions of Xochimilco's festivities. *"En una buena fiesta se queman cuarenta gruesas de cohetes*." ["In a good party, forty *gruesas* of fireworks will be burned"], Don

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food product for which they are known. Other examples in this immedite region include the *Feria del Amaranto* promoting and celebrating the amaranth, and the *Feria del Nopal,* both traditional food crops prepared in a variety of popular ways.

[23] Devotees of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* who come from around the country on the annual pilgrimage often refer to themselves as *guadalupanos*. Aside from the pilgrimage on December 12, the day of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, different regions have specific days of the year that they accustom an annual pilgrimage. Catholics in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala share two principal pilgrimages which are traditionally very important to their communities, though with different dates, the annual visit to la Villa and an annual visit to Chalma.

Agustín tells me, and the host will spend over $180,000 pesos. Twelve dozen fireworks are equal to one gruesa, which means that for a *good* party, the host will provide 5,760 fireworks at an approximate cost of US$20,000.[24] The show is not only for the immediate guests, who are close enough that they will share a collective excitement as well as pleasure as the show progresses, but for the Xochimilca community at large that enjoys the lights in the skies regardless of their distance from the party.

At one posada to which he invites me to be held in the *barrio de Tlacoapa* this December, he tells me the hosts will spend even more—$210,000 pesos—for fireworks to be burned over less than two hours. Don Agustín's costs for a finished *castillo* run him about $10,000 pesos (US $1,111). A small bull runs $500 (US$55) and a large bull twice that amount. The *toritos* are particularly exciting and even dangerous, resembling the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain in some ways. A person—usually if not always a man—carries the structure in the shape of a bull on his head and runs around a crowded plaza as it shoots *buscapiés*–fireworks that whistle along the ground—near the participants' feet. [25]

"Why do they spend so much?" I ask with eyes wide open, incredulous. *"Por la crítica al posadero"* ["Because of the criticism to the host"], he does not hesitate to answer, and people inevitably say things like: *"teniendo tanto dinero, solo hicieron mole y no carnitas"*. ["Having so much money, they only made *mole* and not *carnitas*."] Yet despite the close social scrutiny of appropriate display for fiestas, in food or fireworks, Don Agustín laughs and says he does not

[24] At the current exchange rate of 9 pesos to the dollar.
[25] Certainly, they can not be called spectators given their full-bodied interaction with the bull!

do all the fiestas in Xochimilco because most people pay poorly and purchase low quality goods which he does not provide. He says it amuses him to see the *cohetero* at the barrio fiestas making the sign of the cross and praying before lighting the *castillo*, unsure of his work. Perhaps food is more important than fireworks here, but there too people in charge make the sign of the cross at several stages in the cooking process.

I ask Don Agustín if he thinks these traditions can endure into the future. *"Estas tradiciones—la comida, el pulque, las fiestas— no van a acabar jamás. Es una costumbre que la gente ya la tiene"* ["These traditions—the food, the pulque, and the parties—will never cease. It is a custom people have"], he assures me. "My son sees me sign up to contribute a barrel of pulque for a local fiesta and later my son will grow up and do the same thing," he asserts, echoing the confidence that many in Xochimilco have expressed to me that local traditions will continue forever, though perhaps "improving" in the future. [26]

Reflecting some more, Don Agustín offers:

> *"De Tijuana pa'ya, ya no hay costumbres para los festivales y las fiestas—ya es puro pizza y Kentucky [Fried Chicken]. Pero esa misma gente manda muchos verdes con la lista de lo que quieren que se compre para la fiesta del barrio o del pueblo: el castillo, la música, las flores, la misa, y la comida*."

[26] Referring to the formal *promesa* that people usually make at least a year in advance to contribute something to the holy figure in question. A promesa can also consist of the promise to undertake a pilgrimage, to Chalma for instance, for a given number of years: for instance, a person who prayed to El Señor de Chalma asking that their mother be saved from a given illness may offer this manifestation of Jesus Christ that they will walk from their home to the holy site every year for 20 years. On the pilgrimage to Chalma that I undertook with a group from Ocotepec, I was passed on the difficult mountain trail by elderly people fulfilling their *promesa* as well as children accompanying their families.

> ["From Tijuana up, there are no customs for festivals and parties anymore—it is all pizza and Kentucky Fried Chicken.[27] But those same people send plenty of greens back with a list of what they want to be purchased for the barrio or village fiesta: the castle, the music, the flowers, the Mass, and the food."]

Food is the measure of tradition. Yet while Mexicans may lose some of their traditions in the United States, he assures me plenty of them send plenty of dollars—*los verdes*—home with a list of what they want purchased for the fiesta in their barrio or *pueblo.* Of these key ingredients for community celebrations, and despite men's primary responsibility for slaughtering pigs and cattle and preparing *carnitas* and *barbacoa*, *la comida*–everything made in a clay pot or *cazuela*, is in the hands of the women.

January 14, 2001. Time/Rhythms

Re-reading Mariano Azuela's classic *Los de Abajo* about the Mexican Revolution from my room in *el callejón Bodoquepa,* I reflect on the ritual/seasonal sense of time that is palpable in this community and that sets it apart from the huge metropolis it borders. Azuela refers to the long and uneventful days of the Mexican countryside interrupted only by news brought in by the *arrieros* on donkeys. Bodoquepa is amazingly isolated and rooted in the past, though locals have been working for salaried jobs in Mexico City in large numbers since the train provided easy transportation in the early part of the last century and especially when the city redirected the water from the local canals to provide for the increasing needs of the growing urban area. "The city stole the

[27] He is referring to Mexicans who have migrated to find work in the United States.

water," Xochimilcas say—rendering the chinampas unproductive for a couple of years before the government began replacing the clean water they took with wastewater they pumped back. Even despite obvious changes in this town over the fifteen years since I first came here to live in 1985—more people, more cars, more pollution, and more crime—the rituals that bind everyday life with fiestas seem to help maintain a sense of stability and predictability.

As in most small communities, people frequently get excited and gossip about events in the neighborhood such as a man leaving his wife or somebody being robbed in the alley, but by and large events like the Popocatepetl erupting last month are absorbed into the cyclical patterns that repeat themselves on the calendar and that make each year much like the one before. With so many *fiestas* and *mayordomías* on the calendar, many people are regularly planting corn or raising pigs, chickens or cattle for a particular event. Even people without animals are often directly linked to a family that is—saving dried tortillas and food scraps for a neighbor who swings by regularly to collect them, carrying a bucket on a bicycle or with a wheelbarrow. Many women embroider napkins and baskets in which to serve the tortillas at an upcoming celebration, or save eggshells to fill with confetti for children to smash at the next holiday, such as the Day of the Child on April 1st, a birthday party, or a Christmas posada.

When I see Señora Rosa saving crate after crate of empty eggshells, today as she did when I first met her fifteen years ago, and listen to her share her anxiety about her daughter's pending operation, her comadre's deteriorating health, or a neighbor's problem, it seems like this could be yesterday, or fifty years ago,

maybe more. Somehow, it seems the many and intricate details of preparing for fiestas that pervade daily life in Xochimilco help keep the chaos of the city and of life in general at bay. Most of the time or on some levels anyway.

December 16, 2000. Primera posada del Niñopa

Anyone who came near the *barrios* of *Caltongo* or *Xaltocán* in a vehicle tonight made a mistake. The Niñopa procession had the two main streets blocked for over two hours. Antonio invited me to join his family to see the fireworks and collect my *colación* –peanuts and candy—at the first posada. I could not refuse the opportunity to speak with his mother and grandmother, especially since they are hosting the Niñopa this coming year and I had been trying for months to talk to them. I appreciated Antonio's intercession, as Señora Rosa's attempts to help me with introductions proved counterproductive. Paradoxically, my closeness to Señora Rosa has only made it harder for me to speak with her *consuegra* or in-law, Antonio's mother.

The taxi driver we try to enlist for transportation leaves us halfway, refusing to get too close to the mob. By the end of the evening, I am exhausted from walking from one end of Xochimilco to the other and back in the icy-cold wind.

We begin in the barrio of the first *posadero* of this Christmas season. The family borrowed the Niñopa this morning and now hosts the posada at the home of the sacred figure—that is the home of the *mayordomo* who is housing him for

the year. The crowd joins the procession and accompanies the baby across town in full fanfare. xxx

As usual, the first sign that we are getting close to our destination is the fireworks in the sky. This *posadera* family has enlisted the help of a team of volunteers to keep order. Very professional-looking young men and women with nametags and radios are keeping people to the sides of the streets so the fireworks crew, *chinelos*, musicians, and the family solemnly carrying the Niñopa can get walk down the center of the street and through narrow alleys as we make our way to the posada.

More young men pull a little cart full of the bottle rockets, called *luces de Bengala*[28] ahead of the procession, lighting them by the armful and distributing them to the crowds on either side. We fall in step with the procession, stopping now and then to watch a spectacular fireworks display—including a mini *castillo* with twirling figures that ends with the family's name in lights. Antonio, whose allegiance is with Don Agustín, does not miss an opportunity to point out the poor quality of the display, noting the excessive smoke and lack of power, which results in people being showered with fire on several occasions. On one occasion a rocket is fired into the branches of a tree and comes down on the head of an elderly woman. As usual, I marvel at the level of risk that is accepted as a part of everyday life.

As we walk, I am impressed with the many booths of traditional candies and snacks that line the street and which are a specialty of Xochimilco. There is

[28] Long sparkles—whose names are a direct reference to Asia, from where gunpowder diffused.

alegría, made of honey and the amaranth seed that the Spaniards tried to eradicate because they considered the figurines of Nahuatl gods that locals made and ate for special celebrations to be sacrilegious.[29] There are also pumpkin seed candies, local fruits caramelized in sugar, *quesadillas* and *sopes* on huge *comales* and more. What surprises me is the new addition, fast becoming a standard in fairs and street processions as well as the market: microwaved popcorn. People tell me this is not really new, that they always loved popcorn, it is just that before they only ate popcorn in the circus. I wonder if microwave technology and the commercialization of microwaveable popcorn—that now appears in the markets in individual packets alongside the ingredients for *mole*—has brought new traditions or simply allowed Mexicans to celebrate more easily with corn, the key ingredient in most Mexican celebrations.

After the last fireworks display outside the gates of the posadero's house, the Niñopa is taken into the huge garden which is opened to all who want to participate in the rosary. Hundreds pack into the yard, which is adorned with *piñatas*, little flags of *papel picado* or traditional cut paper and lights of every color—all strung overhead. After the rosary, the thousands that have gathered and patiently waited out all the "Hail Marys" and "Our Fathers" of the final ceremony line up to gather the *colación:* little brown paper bags filled with toasted unshelled peanuts and the special Christmas candy everyone expects at such an event. The bags are stamped with the name of the family who hosted this first

[29] Amaranth (*Amaranthus cruentus* Linn.) or huatli was widely consumed in prehispanic Mexico but was widely destroyed in the colonial period due to its association with indigenous religious practices; more recently, agronomists and nutritionists have recognized have recognized its high protein content (Warman 1988:19).

posada of the Christmas season. As we walk home, cracking open and eating our peanuts, we pass many smaller fiestas where people have pulled their tables and *cazuelas* or *comales* into the street to celebrate the aftermath of the posada with friends and family.[30]

December 17, 2000. Cows on chinampas

I ask Doña Coco if thievery is indeed a key reason why many have stopped planting the chinampas these days as many have told me. She says it is true: *"Se dedican a eso…a ver cuando estan maduros los elotes para pasar a robarlos."* ["There are people who devote themselves to that, just waiting for the corn to be ripe so they can come by on a canoe and steal it."]

She retorts in anger when I mention the bulls that were stolen from Antonio's grandfather: *"Pues pa'qué se lleva sus animales a las chinampas?!"* ["Well, why does he take his animals to the chinampas?"] Don Miguelito had been raising cows and selling their milk to help with his family's expenses of the upcoming Niñopa *mayordomía* (Figure 32). One morning when he went to feed them on the chinampa he found only the remains of two of that had been slaughtered on the spot and taken away as meat on a canoe in the middle of the night. After that incident he moved into a little shack on the chinampa where he sleeps every night, guarding the remaining cattle with a gun. Doña Claudia answers her own question, explaining that Don Miguelito had to move his animals onto one of the family chinampas a couple of years ago when they started

[30] Cazuelas are clay pots and comales are disk-like things made out of clay or metal that are placed over a firewood or other stove and used to grill tortillas and other corn foods.

building the house for the Niñopa in the house-lot garden where he had been stabling them at the time.

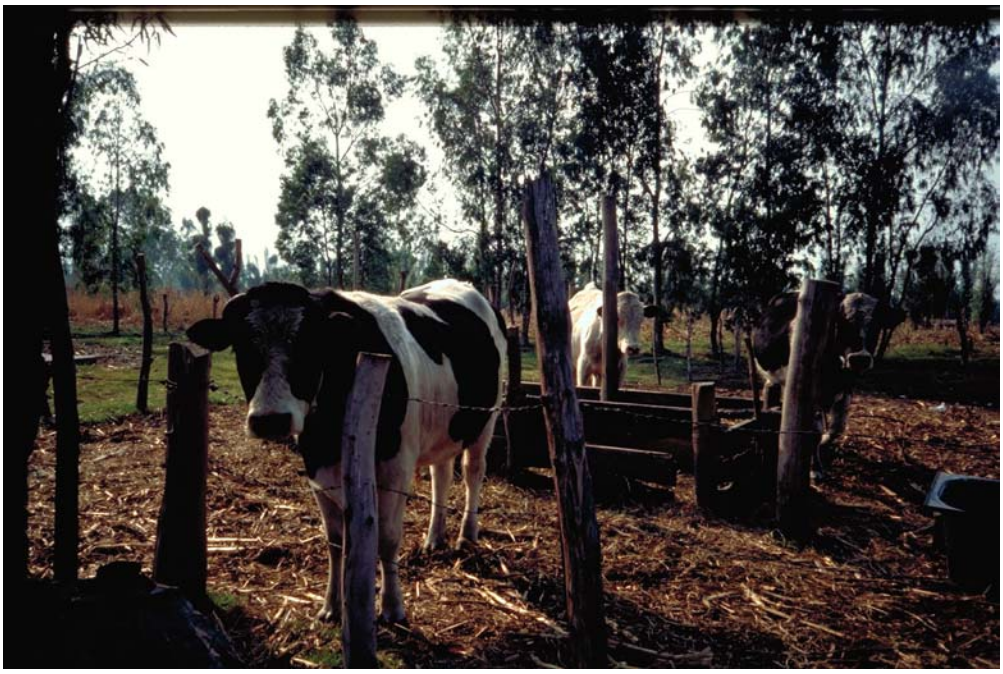

Figure 32: Cows on chinampas

Many families in the *callejón* raise their cows and pigs on the edge of the canal. Doña Claudia, like many other neighbors, criticizes the people who allow animal waste runoff into the canal. As is usually the case when I speak with older women (she appears to be in her sixties) about how things have changed or stayed the same, she refers to the days when the canals were so clean you could drink the water and you could see a spoon at the bottom. In her opinion, the people who raise animals on the edge of the canals are largely responsible for the water pollution in the community. This despite my memory of the neighborhood

organizing to oust a tire manufacturer whose industrial process at the mouth of the *callejón* was heavily contaminating the water. Ironically, that effort was led by Doña Claudia's husband, whose traditional livelihood depended on growing plants that he watered directly from the canal.

December 26, 2000. Don Goyo y el mole

Over 60,000 people from three states near Xochimilco (Mexico, Morelos, Puebla) are in shelters tonight as a result of the government's emergency response to the Popocatepetl's eruption a couple of days ago. Referred to respectfully as *Don Gregorio* by the people in the largely indigenous communities that surround the volcano, "he" has been relatively quiet since. Among the people interviewed by TV news crews today, a 107-year-old man says Don Gregorio has been kind thanks to the regular offerings of *mole* that people have been making him. Speaking of food, I learned that refugees in Cuernavaca's shelter complained bitterly when they were served fried chicken for Christmas Eve. *Mole* would have been more appropriate, but beyond the scope of the soldiers to prepare.

January 20, 2001. Making *carnitas*

I arrive at Antonio's family's house early in the evening. As it turns out, the uncle that will be coming to butcher the sow is late. He is still busy with a job that he began yesterday, butchering four pigs for another fiesta. With many newly arrived people wanting to maintain traditions in which they never participated before, some do not seem to know what they are getting into when they decide to

host a fiesta. The uncle complains about folks not having the right pans or enough firewood for him to do his job.

Things do not get started until 10 p.m. I feel like a soldier in the field now, so unappetizing is this particular participant-observation episode to me. I do not want to be here at all, but with this ritual such a core part of the whole food preparation process, I feel it is my duty of sorts, and Antonio's family apparently expected me to witness it. But I cheat, joining the squeamish young women in the outer circle where we do not have a full view of the slaughter. They seem to be sharing in the excitement but stick together, separate from and behind the young men. The men, on the other hand, seem eager to get as close as they can. As on other occasions, the house-lot garden is clearly gendered, with the men usually closest to the meat and the alcohol. But even though I cover my ears, the sow's prolonged, piercing squeals are impossible to keep out. One of Antonio's cousins tells me that my feeling sorry for her only prolongs her agony and pain. I feel guilty about my cowardice until I learn that *la abuelita* is in her room crying her eyes out for her pig at the same time. Perhaps it is she that is prolonging the poor sow's suffering.

This pig is sacrificed for the formal ceremony tomorrow, *la bendición* [the blessing]. A priest will come bless the Niñopa's newly constructed house as well as the *estudiantina* [musicians][31] and the *comparza de chinelos*[32] who will accompany the Niñopa for the entire year throughout this coming *mayordomía.*

[31] Of Spanish origin.
[32] The comparza is the unit of chinelos that work together with one leader, sometimes formed for a particular event or time period.

They are mostly young kids from the *callejón*, some of whom are learning to play musical instruments for the first time in order to participate, though one of the most enthusiastic is a cousin who lives in downtown Mexico City. *Carnitas* and other dishes will be served. The sow's 14 piglets—all pretty big themselves though not half her size—will be killed over the next 12 days throughout preparations for the big day on February 2nd. They will go in part to feeding the cooks who will be working every day to prepare the main meal.

The slaughter takes place in the house-lot garden, right between the pigpens. I feel particularly bad for the piglets in those pens that are so close to their mother's death. Tools include an axe to stun the sow, a knife to cut into her heart and kill her, and two pans to gather her blood for the *moronga* or blood sausage. A huge kettle of water boils over firewood, awaiting the hide, so that it can be scraped hairless and made into *chicharrón* and *chales*. The uncle, his son, and his nephew Antonio work until after 3 a.m. When they stop, they leave the meat hanging until morning, when they will continue preparing the food for the day's guests (Figure 33).

Señora Rosa had told me that Antonio's uncle makes the best *carnitas* in the barrio. Quite a compliment, for this barrio in particular! *"Son las únicas que no me caen mal"* ["They are the only ones that do not make me sick"], she says. I am never sure with Señora Rosa and her food tolerance, since she proudly and stubbornly continued to eat *mole* throughout the years that she was saving money to have her gallbladder removed, despite doctor's warnings that she stop eating anything heavy. It seems to be more than a matter of pleasure and taste, the way

older people insist on eating *mole* against doctor's orders and would appear that they do not believe the doctor knows what he is talking about. Another neighbor who is known as being *"muy fiestera"* ["a real partier"] shared a bag of green tea with me, saying they were her protection against feeling ill after eating *mole*. She carried several in her purse at all times so as to be prepared should the event arise to partake in a celebration.

The next day at the cooking site I tell Antonio's uncle that I have heard of his reputation and want to know what makes his *carnitas* so good. In response, he lists many of the ways that people who do not know what they are doing often ruin *carnitas*, such as boiling the meat in water instead of frying it in its own lard. He soaks the meat in tequila, oranges, pineapple, milk, and herbs before frying it. No wonder they smell and taste so good, I think, recalling how little I lasted as a vegetarian when I first arrived in Mexico fifteen years ago.

Figure 33: Pig's head

I do not last long in the yard tonight. Early in the butchering process, when it becomes obvious I am not going to come to the front, Antonio takes my camera away from me so he can take pictures himself. Fine, it is his pig, after all, and I am feeling a little dizzy and weak in the knees. I find that I can finally make myself truly useful with the final cleaning efforts in the Niñopa's new house, using my

nails to scrape the paint off the windows. My extra height proves a real bonus and I work past midnight, happy to finally have the opportunity to contribute something extra. Antonio's *abuelita*, silent and suspicious every time I had been around before, finally speaks to me when I leave: *"buenas noches guerita."* ["Good night blondie."]

January 21, 2001. Women of the circle

I arrive early in the morning. Two women are already here cleaning *jamaica* or hibiscus blossoms in the yard. I ask the *abuelita*[33] [grandmother]—as everybody calls her out of respect—for an apron. Now I understand why many women in Xochimilco wear an apron over nice and not-so-nice clothes. Today most of them have a sweater on top.

After years of making *agua de jamaica*[34] for my children, today I learn that—according to these women—the best way is to select two types of *jamaica,* or hibiscus flower: one for flavor and one for color. Two large sacks have been purchased at the principal wholesale market in Mexico City, the *Central de Abastos*, along with 250 kilos of rice and 200 of beans. And crates of onions, chilies, tomatoes, and more.

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[33] Older women are often called *abuelita* or grandmother by younger people in Xochimilco out of respect. In the same way, the term *tía* or aunt is used to address women who are younger, or your age, out of respect. Both terms refer to a kinship network that is based on reciprocity and respect to a great extent, rather than blood.

[34] In the U.S., hisbiscus tea in not uncommon. In central Mexico, water made from hibiscus—whether or not it involves boiling water—is not considered a tea but one of many naturally flavored waters, like *agua de limón* or lemonade.

Figure 34: Women of the circle

Between the three of us in the circle, we soon finish cleaning the *jamaica* and move on to the huge sack of *chile guajillo* for the *barbacoa.* It appears that the house blessing formally launched the work party, for soon the circle widens to include six women. More are women in their sixties or older, though a young woman from Puebla who married into the community is here with her mother-in-law and young daughter. The elderly women are clearly the guardians of tradition, and respected as such. Some young women in the barrio have even told me that *las abuelitas* hide the *mole* recipe from the younger women, especially their daughters-in-law.

Antonio's mother, Doña Margarita, is an elementary school teacher who works morning and afternoon shifts. His grandmother, together with her husband Don Miguelito, made the commitment to this *mayordomía* over two decades ago.[35] *La abuelita* works all day taking care of the animals in the house-lot garden, cooking for the family, and recently, making final preparations for the Niñopa. She is in charge of organizing the work crew today and throughout the preparations, assigning each member a specific *comisión* or task. Doña Margarita and the *abuelita* are both preparing food themselves and supervising the crew of women volunteers.

Several circles of women form (Figure 34). The Olivares sisters—never absent from a barrio commitment—chop serrano chilies, onion, tomato and cilantro to prepare *pico de gallo* for the *carnitas*. At the end of the day, the Membrillos form their circle again, this time to wash dishes in a series of buckets (Figure 35).

Many people bring us food as we continue working throughout the day. First *la abuelita* passes us *tacos de chalecitos*—thick, gooey pig rind—, the most delicious part of the pig for my taste but only when freshly cooked and still warm.[36] Somebody else brings a basket of fresh cheese cut into little cubes, another a basket of cookies. A man arrives with a basket carrying brandy and coke, as well as tequila; after offering drinks to the men sitting around the yard

[35] Several different family members told me about when the host couple signed up for the commitment to host the Niñopa. In addition, their names are on the list of future hosts included as an appendix of a Master's thesis focusing on the Niñopa (Orta Hernández 1991).

[36] With a father-in-law from the state best known for *carnitas*, Michoacán, I learned to eat meat, and especially *buche* and *chales,* when I first moved to Mexico in 1985 and regularly participated in the family gatherings at his house on Sundays.

talking or helping with the meat, he finally offers some to the women. Then another round of *chales*. And *pico de gallo.* Warm tortillas. Not bad at all.

Figure 35: Sisters washing dishes in a circle

In the back corner of this makeshift outdoor kitchen, another circle of women fry pasta in the largest clay pot I have ever seen. The *cazuela* permanently resides in that particular corner, but I have not seen it turned right side up until today. Earlier, a woman took the tomatoes to grind at the *molino* in the *plaza de la Asunción* just outside the *callejón.* It is ready to pour over the fried pasta; after that the women add fresh chicken broth.[37]

[37] Sopa de pasta is a pretty standard first plate for everyday meals in central Mexico and was cooked for the workers on this occasion—both the women cooking and the men cleaning up the neighborhood.

No one goes hungry in these circles. And no one is lonely. As the drinking continues, the men get more emotional. They hug and talk, some even cry. The women talk, laugh, and keep working. The circle expands and contracts as some women join and others leave throughout the day, but the gender lines never vary.

Figure 36: Hot chilies

Conversations surprise me: spicy like the chilies we are cleaning (Figure 36). Jokes and complaints about men, gossip about women. This is definitely a powerful circle of female energy, womenspace. My questions and notebook have no place here, so small and finite in contrast to *desbordante* or overflowing reality. It is best to shut up and listen. I do.

Señora Rosa says she does not like to go to fiestas because everyone is always criticizing everything and everybody. I can see what she means. It is also a place where people notice your skills and willingness to participate in the collective tasks or not. She has a horror story of arriving early at a fiesta many years ago and being assigned to make a large amount of rice in one of those huge *cazuelas*, something she had never done before and which threw her into a panic. Luckily, another person arrived shortly afterwards who knew what to do. But, she complains, there is too much gossip in these circles and little to do with God in all the eating and drinking. But I think she does not like fiestas in part because staying out of them creates a distance and sets hers apart from the neighbor

women who know too much about her already and whom she knows too much about. She leaves the fiestas to her sister Josefina, whose presence fulfills the need for her household's participation, and is so constant at local fiestas that she has a reputation of getting around as much as the Niñopa.

Today, on several occasions I observe the raised eyebrows. At one point, the women of the circle question the way we are doing things. Several of us had been deveining the *chiles guajillos* for a while when one woman asks: "Do we leave the veins in or out?" The eldest woman is usually in charge, and in this case the *mayordoma* is both the eldest and the boss, so Antonio's *abuelita* is called in to determine the course of action. There are sideways glances among the women of the circle when she says to leave them in. We proceed, now leaving both the veins and seeds in, removing only the stem of the chili, until Antonio's mother, the next ranking authority after *la abuelita* comes and says in protest: "What? You are leaving the seeds in?"

When somebody explains that we are doing what the *mayordoma* requested, her daughter decides that there has been a misunderstanding. We are to leave the veins in for spiciness but definitely take the seeds out. They are saved to be taken to the *molino* the next day for another favorite Xochimilca dish, *pepitas de chile.* Made with onion and garlic and sometimes sesame seeds ground alongside the chili seeds, this poor person's *mole* is unbeatable served with *nopales*.

What most impresses me about this episode and several others is that nobody in the circle dares to question the *mayordoma* even when all the women

know we are doing the wrong thing. I come up against similar boundaries and hierarchies that limit individual decision-making later when I try to jump in and help somebody with specific tasks. My spontaneity and volunteerism are unwelcome in this setting. The women are not authorized to negotiate their pre-assigned responsibility. Their allegiance to the *mayordoma* and to carrying out their commitment or *comisión* as agreed upon in advance supercedes any individual decision or variation on the theme. Each time I finish my chore I am sent back to the *abuelita* for her to decide what I should do next.

Talk around the dining table is often *spicy* in Mexico, full of details related to bodies and desire, as might be expected in the sensual realm of food.[38] But while plenty of jokes revolve around chilies in thinly veiled references to the male penis, more intimate and direct sex talk is usually reserved for same-sex crowds. Within this social context, perhaps the following incident should not have come as a surprise to me.

Doña Margarita's husband approached us and tried to joke with me. *"Cuidado no vaya a tocar a Don Panchito,"* he chuckled, ["Be careful you do not touch Don Panchito"]. His sexual innuendo—feigning concern that I might touch my husband's genitals with burning chili residue on my fingers—insinuated a close relationship with both my ex-husband and myself that he did not have. It was totally inappropriate and unexpected, particularly given the powerful gendered space on which he was treading, and I sat there wondering how drunk he was. Perhaps made bolder by my silence, he made the mistake of following up

[38] For a history of chile in Mexico including its use in rituals and as tribute and a classification and list of names in different indigenous tongues, see Janet Long-Solís (1986).

with a more direct insult to the older women of the circle. *"Eso es para las señoras grandes, ellas ya no agarran nada,"* he says. ["That is for old women, they do not touch anyone anymore."] The implication was that only older women should be working in the circle peeling chilies because they were too old for sex and would not be touching a penis for the rest of their lives anyway.

One of the skinny old crones in the circle turned to him and fired back: *"¿No que nos agarramos a nosotras mismas!"* ["But do not we touch ourselves?"] The entire circle of women burst into laughter with this allusion to women's sexual self-sufficiency and masturbation. Doña Margarita's husband hastily retreated liked a whipped pup with his tail between his legs.

He was not the only one surprised, although sexual jokes do come up frequently when cooking in general and with chili in particular. There is something about the collective, outdoor, and semi-public space of the cooking circle in the house-lot yard that invites intimate conversation and hearty laughter. Over and over in my fieldwork I found that in the gendered and social environment of collective food preparation women tend to talk about personal details that are generally not appropriate in mixed company or a more intimate setting including the indoor kitchen.

I think of a parallel with the plaza in Mexico and other Latin American settings, where it is socially acceptable for young couples to kiss and hold each other in public in ways they would not dare do in a more private and less supervised setting. I wonder, is the house-lot garden to the indoor kitchen as the park is to the bedroom?

January 21, 2001. Don Miguelito

> *"Soy analfabeta, pero soy un hombre honrado y de mucha fé. Me gusta conocer."*
>
> ["I am illiterate, but an honest man with much faith. I like to learn/know."]

God brought Don Miguelito to Xochimilco. Work is what is important, he tells me. Who knows what will happen to us, he says, then looking me straight in the eyes, he asks: *"Usted sabe cuándo va a morir?"* ["Do you know when you are going to die?"] *"Pues, no*," I reply. ["Well, no."] *"Ya ve?"* ["You see?"], he asks rhetorically, satisfied, though far from smug. He has made his point.

I am giving my fingers a break from peeling chilies in the women's circle, and have joined the men in the back of the yard where the *carnitas* are almost done. Don Miguelito and his friends, many of whom speak Otomí like himself, are drinking pulque. I drink tequila; others drink *Brandy Presidente*[39] and coke. Every now and then another woman comes back with an empty platter that she loads with the hot *carnitas* that are coming out of the huge metal pot sizzling over the firewood (Figure 37).

[39] "Brandy Presidente" is a common and inexpensive alcoholic beverage made from sugar cane in Mexico and not to be confused with the expensive drink known as "brandy." Popular among the middle-class, it is in any case considered superior by the young and those aspiring to climb the social ladder to the indigenous pulque made of the century plant and now drunk mostly by older, traditional men in central Mexico.

Figure 37: Gendered space: man making *carnitas*

"Y a usted, ¿qué le parecen nuestras tradiciones?" he asks me. "*Bonitas ¿verdad?"* ["What do you think of our traditions? Beautiful, aren't they?"] And we toast with our plastic cups, standing next the huge *cazuela* where the cooked meat is placed. I ask about the future of this tradition and somebody answers that traditions in Xochimilco will never die but rather improve in the future. The young will carry them forth, all agree, changing them as necessary.

Orphaned in his native *Estado de México* at the age of eight, Don Miguelito left his Otomí village and made his way to Mexico City to join some cousins and work in construction. *"Allá dejé mi yunque de bueyes y de mula*," he says. ["I left my plow pulled by oxen and mules."] A skinny little boy, he remembers everything being too heavy for him at his work. After injuring his foot, he was sent back to his village. *"Pero ya no me gustó,"* he said, ["I no

longer liked it."] He had developed a taste for the city and earning money and soon returned.

"Fue un jueves." ["It was a Thursday,"] he recalls. He had just finished eating the last *gorditas* of corn dough and pork lard that he brought with him from home. He was leaning into the river to drink, crying because he had no money and no work. Then he appeared, the mysterious stranger who led him to Xochimilco and whom he never saw again. The man asked him why he was crying. He had been without work or money for several days himself. But he shared his tortilla with Juan, pulling it out of his *morralito* or traditional woven shoulder bag. When they finished eating, they took the *tren amarillo* [the yellow train] to Xochimilco The man promised they would find work there. At the market in Xochimilco, they bought some *nopales* and *tortillas* with the small amount of money Juan had left. The man asked Juan for his last twenty-cent coin to pay for using a restroom. He never returned. *"Desapareció y nunca más volvió. Fue Dios."* ["He disappeared and never came back. It was God."]

Juan soon found a man who offered him work working the fields in the chinampas. They agreed on three pesos per day, and that Miguelito could stay until he married. He did, lasting twenty years with him, and has fond memories of those years. *"Lo del sueldo era lo de menos*, says Juan, *me quedé porque compartía parejo su comida."* ["The meager salary did not matter; I stayed because he shared his food equally."]

January 21, 2001. *La Bendición* [The blessing]

Before *la comida*—the mid-day meal—the priest blesses *"las personas de la casa y del barrio,"* ["the people of the house and the community."] I am surprised to hear him urge people to recognize their *mexicandad*. Their Mexicanity, he says, includes Spanish and indigenous elements, both the dance of the *chinelos* and the Niñopa tradition that are beautiful and deep rooted. After the blessing, one of the many people packed into the Niñopa's new house asks if the dance of the *chinelos* is of the devil, *del diablo*. The answer is "no": alcohol in excess is the problem, not the dance *per se*. It is fine to dance, the priest indicates, as long as the intent is clear, and that is to celebrate the presence of God in the house. The question provokes a brief sermon against alcoholism and domestic violence, both of which plague the local community. I am left pondering the ongoing struggle of the Catholic church to keep Xochimilcas and so many others in Mexico who celebrate traditions of old within its fold.

January 28, 2001. *Limpiando tamarindo* [Cleaning tamarind seeds]

It is Sunday and the sound of church bells ringing atop the *Capilla de la Asunción* permeates the *callejón*. I am the first in the house-lot garden this morning, peeling tamarind. No one to talk to, place to myself. Roosters crowing, pigs snorting. Looking up, I see cauliflowers on the chinampa across the canal. Huge *cazuelas de barro* around me. Stacks of bulk food purchased yesterday at the *Central de Abastos*: sacks of potatoes, crates of tomatoes (*jitomate)* and green

tomatoes (*tomate),* boxes of garlic, sacks of *tamarindo*. Fresh green chilies, dried *mulato* chilies (Figure 38).

Figure 38: Crates of tomatoes for Niñopa meal

More women trickle in, soon forming a circle of seven. Mostly *abuelitas:* Señora Josefina and la comadre Meme among them, the latter Doña Claudia's mother-in-law. Peeling the *tamarindo* for the *agua fresca* is the first task today. Hands are busy, the day is long.

As we work in the yard preparing food, the men clean the *callejón.* They cut down a dead tree and spend the day carrying it out in pieces, my eleven-year old son Mario helping with this task. They string wires back and forth and hang lights and colorful *papel picado* [flags made of cut-up crepe paper] on them to announce the arrival of the Niñopa. Many neighbors paint their outside walls.

In the circle, listening is rich. Talk turns to how lazy women are today. One woman stops working to point at me with her finger. I am an exception: a young woman willing to work. Another *abuelita* goes farther: women today are just cigarette smokers, short skirts, and crossed legs. *"*They buy a few pesos of

beans and a few *chiles rellenos* at the *cocina económica"* [inexpensive restaurant or food stand with traditional style daily fare] *"*and take that home to their families." Yes, the rest comment, shaking their heads with disapproval. And yet, another woman comments, it is cheaper to buy food at the cocina económica today than to pay for black beans and the gas it takes to cook them.

Another complaint: young women are not respectful anymore; they refuse to be subordinate to men. *"Ya no aguantan las mujeres,"* complains one woman—women just can not take it anymore, referring to the traditional female role and treatment which younger women are not all eager to accept. One woman complains of her son's failed marriage, blaming his lazy wife: she advised him to look for a woman *"que sí acepte sufrir"* ["that would accept suffering"]. Apparently, for many, though not all of these older women, women's lot is to suffer. But they all agree it is getting harder and harder for young men to find women who *"accept suffering."*

"Ya no aguantan los chingadazos!" jokes another, with a clever twist of phrase, implying that what women are expected to tolerate is abuse that maybe they are right in rejecting. The term *"chingadazos,"* from the verb *chingar* that is a part of most Mexican explicatives and can be loosely defined as "to screw." In the context of this conversation and social context, *chingadazos* might be interpreted as physical blows or beatings. Despite the occasional joke, the topic is a serious one and the women of the circle—including younger women—are perturbed by the loss of respect for tradition, though they recognize that some traditions in the household are not in women's interest (Figure 39)..

Figure 39: Women of the circle

Stories turn to cases of wife-beating and to those women who do not tolerate domestic violence: some hit back, others leave the men that abuse them, and some even manage to reform them and achieve some kind of domestic peace, if not bliss. But while they chuckled at hearing of women who beat their husbands, this is clearly an inversion of the gender paradigm, and almost as unusual as a man who wears an apron. Yet while I heard several stories of women who hit their husbands during my years in Xochimilco, I never heard of a man who wore an apron. One young man even told me that men call a man who goes to the market or helps his wife or mother in the kitchen a *mandilón* [apron-wearer], definitely a pejorative term.

The talk about women suffering at the hands of men's worst behaviors finally gets to me and I make the mistake of assuming some "shared sisterhood" and open my big mouth. *"Por eso yo no tengo* marido,*"* I say, ["That is why I do not have a husband"], implying that I chose not to have a husband because it was

too much trouble. A sudden silence explodes in the circle and weighs on me like an elephant. Eyebrows go up and they all look at me as if seeing me for the first time. Señora Josefina, Señora Rosa's sister, and a single mother who endured more than her share of public scrutiny, intercedes on my behalf, saving my reputation. *"Claro que tiene marido"* ["Of course she has a husband"], she assures the women of the circle, as if clarifying a minor point; *"solo que él vive en Cuernavaca ahorita y ella vive aquí"* ["It is just that he lives in Cuernavaca right now and she lives here"]. *Aaah,* the collective sigh of relief is audible and the women go back to work. Thank you Doña Josefina. Seems like I will be able to return tomorrow after all.

Clearly it is unacceptable that I should be unmarried. Perhaps in part because these women know my ex-husband and my children, *los gueritos* [the blondies], everyone in the barrio insists on treating me as Pancho's wife even though many know we are divorced. In another collective outdoor cooking experience, several women ask me outright if I still *let Pancho sleep with me.* I explained that he was remarried and I had a *novio*. On another occasion, Doña Margarita, 81 and a widow of about 40 years, insisted that she would have accepted her husband back in my circumstances. *"Yo sí lo dejaría"* ["I would let him"].[40] But she seems to have only good memories of her marriage.

[40]Doña Margarita has only fond memories of her husband, whom she says was not her husband but her treasure. See her story in the next section.

January 28, 2001. A woman's handshake

"A woman's handshake," I've often thought to myself as women with hands full of *masa* or cornmeal offer their forearm to another's outstretched hand. Today, as part of the circle, my fingers sticky with tamarind pulp, I offer my forearm several times. Every time a woman joins our circle she first goes around and shakes every other woman's forearm. Then she puts on her apron and joins the circle. Rituals. I've never felt such a part of this community as every time someone shook my forearm in the circle.

It is not just a women's thing by any means, but I think of it as the women's handshake, so common is it in these cooking circles. Mechanics with greasy hands do the same thing. With hands dirty, but a handshake socially obligatory in Xochimilco, people at work offer their forearms in greeting. Shaking hands is so important in this barrio that people will shake twice in less than a minute as they stop and put their basket down in the *callejón* to appropriately greet an elder: *"Buenas tardes tía."* And immediately again: *"Buenas tardes*." "Hello." "Goodbye." To do otherwise can be taken as an insult or a sign of broken relations.

"Yo no la saludo hace más de cuarenta años," says Señora Rosa of her mother-in-law who lives at the entrance of the *callejón.* ["I have not said hello to her in over forty years."] In fact, her children did not even know she would have been considered their grandmother in most circumstances. But not here, where kinship is established through reciprocity networks and respect and marked with

frequent handshakes, but blood relations are often severed with fights over land and between women.

February 2, 2001. *El mero día* [The very day]

"¡Ya es tarde, guerita!" ["You are late, blondie!"] several women point out to me at once. The three women who made the *atole* began at 3 a.m., *la abuelita Olivares* among them. Everybody noticed I was not there. With the Niñopa at the center of their universe, I could not explain that I had been in Tetecala, where the *Día de la Candelaria* is also one of the most important community celebrations. My lack of loyalty would be unacceptable, a violation of our relationship. But I am here now, and dive into the final preparations. Today we prepare to serve the large crowds and special distinguished guests: multiple menus and massive quantities. *Hoy es el mero día* [Today is the day].

Figure 40: Arch welcoming Niñopa

The sense of excitement in the air is almost as thick as the smoke. Everything is just about ready. Banners with the Niñopa's image fluttered in the breeze overhead as I walked down the *callejón* from my house. Anyone in the main plaza by *la parroquia*—the parish— could easily find his or her way to the *Niñopa's* destination today and for the year that follows, with banners strung row after row above the main avenue—*Hidalgo*. Three different arches are decorated with *semillas* [seeds]—corn and beans specifically—and mark each turn. The first, marking the entrance into the *callejón* by the *capilla de la Asunción*, is beautifully decorated with flowers made of painted seeds (Figure 40 and 41). Camilo, Señora Rosa's son, tells me the seeds are used to ask the Niñopa for a plentiful harvest.

Figure 41: Arch close-up: flower made of seeds

Another arch of *semillas* bearing an idealized image of the canals and *trajinera* and the Niñopa marks the fork down the narrow alley at the end of the first and wider part of the *callejón*. The final arch has been set up over the entrance that leads into the house-lot garden where the final food preparations are now taking place, and where the Niñopa's new house awaits him.

Walking underneath the final arch, I am enveloped in the smell of wood smoke and a mingling of delicious food scents: *barbacoa, atole, chile*. After walking past the tables that have been set up in the front of the yard, I reach the women's circles in the back. Dignified and somber, again I see these women as the *retaguardia*. Like the women soldiers in black and white photographs of the Mexican Revolution, they are *soldaderas* in the trenches, the circles of women preparing food in the house-lot garden.

The *atole* has been left in the hands of the elders: three older women, their two long gray braids tied together on their backs. It is no easy thing to stir huge pots of *atole* non-stop for hours with big wooden *palas*–literally shovels—or spatulas throughout the night. Besides the certain backache, there is danger of the *atole* spoiling in the cooking process. *"El chiste es la movida,"* the women tell me, ["The trick is to stir it right."] *"Si no, se pega, se corta, se hace bola."*

["Otherwise it scorches, curdles, gets lumpy."] As expected, the three women fulfilled their duty. They are victorious: seven huge *peroles* [pots] brimming with *atole champurrado* sit steaming in the cool morning air.

Made of blue corn toasted on the *comal* and ground at the *molino*, cinnamon, and *piloncillo* [cone of dark sugar], today it also includes fresh milk from Don Miguelito's cows. Blue corn, one woman leans over and tells me: *"Es más sabroso, más oloroso"* ["It has a better flavor and aroma."] *"Mi hija me trajo maíz azul y blanco de la misma tierra,"* she says, *"pero no sabe igual."* ["My daughter brought me blue and white corn from the same land, but it does not taste the same."] "Blue corn tastes better, smells better: you will taste the difference if you compare them," she asserts. I am handed a cup full of hot *atole* and a *cocol* or bread from Chalma with anis seeds as soon as I arrive. A delicious and warm welcome!

By 9 a.m., when I join the group, television crews from national and foreign stations are already here to interview the women—*"las que prepararon el atole, el mole"* ["the ones who prepared the *atole* and the *mole*"]. Their presence has generated great excitement, and everyone is repeating excitedly: *"Que a las cinco y cuarto vamos a estar en la T.V., en el 13, T.V. Azteca!"* ["We'll be on at 5:15 on channel 13!"] The women proudly show the media representatives around the house-lot garden, telling them to point their cameras this way and that. *"Que pasen a la cocina, que vean el arroz, que vean los peroles de carne."* ["Tell them to come into the kitchen, to see the rice, to see the pots of meat."] The women of the circle are the heroines of the day.

The kitchen they refer to in this case is adjacent to the main cooking area in the yard. It seems to be attached to the cooking yard, rather than vice versa. A small, dark, room, only about three women fit in there at a time. Today it is where the meat has been piled high in pots, beef that was soaked in chili and steamed overnight in the back of the yard in huge drums. All over this region, these oil drums commonly replace the traditional *barbacoa* pits, though the *pencas de maguey*–century plant—are still used in the steaming process. I remember seeing *barbacoa* steamed in the ground ten years ago in Teotihuacan, the nearby archeological site that includes the famous Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon, a place where Mexican and foreign tourists flock in droves to get a taste of prehispanic history.

Yesterday, the little indoor kitchen was where the men sat drinking and sharing stories as the women sat nearby in the yard working on the final food preparations. A few days before that, it looked more like a storage shed, piled high with crates and *costales* [large sacks] of food. *La abuelita* sits in the yard at the entrance to the kitchen, her hands tearing the meat into serving-sized chunks. This small smoke kitchen is one of three: including the large cooking area in the yard where the huge *cazuela* always sits over the firewood, and the relatively modern kitchen that Antonio's mother uses that is adjacent and that includes a refrigerator and stove.

Figure 42: Twelve pots of rice

This morning, I count twelve huge *cazuelas de arroz* in a neat line, each on its own pile of rocks or bricks over a small wood fire, each covered with pieces of plastic as they cook: one hundred kilos of rice for today's meal (Figure 42). There are eight *peroles* of meat: Antonio's uncle was back yesterday to help slaughter three bulls and three of the young pigs. The beef is for the masses, the pork is for special guests, for *la mayordomía,* including the *posaderos* that take on the commitment today hand in hand with the chief *mayordomos*, Doña Margarita and Don Miguelito. The *posaderos* will be honored with a special basket of food to take home—*su itacate*—as well, with a whole chicken and some *mole*, *nopales*, salsa and tortillas. Finally, for breakfast, there are the seven big pots of *atole*, in addition to many large baskets covered with cloth, holding the *cocoles*.

The yard is buzzing with activity and expectation. One *abuelita* goes for water to dampen the wood under the rice—*"para apagar el palo que ya prendió"* ["To put out the stick that caught on fire"]. Keeping the temperature under the *cazuelas* just right is no easy feat with firewood. The youth who have been

practicing their songs in the alley every day for the *estudiantina*[41] in the *callejón* are now smartly dressed in gray and white slacks or skirts and blazers. Some of them had never played an instrument before organizing for the Niñopa and are sounding pretty good today. Other young men are in charge of security—*la seguridad*—or mob control: they wear earplugs and carry two-way radios. The crew from T.V. Azteca tries to carry out interviews with the women of the circle but are interrupted time and time again by the sound of fireworks exploding overhead, and of the brass band playing somewhere nearby. They seem disoriented and totally out of place here, so close yet so far from their lives in Mexico City. Amidst the chaos, everyone is offered *atole* and *cocoles* (Figure 43).

Figure 43: Serving everyone *atole* and *cocoles* for breakfast.

The *mayordomos* prepare for today's official ceremonies, beginning with Mass in the main church downtown, *la parroquia.* Leaving the crews of trusted women behind, *la abuelita* says: *"Ahí les encargamos tías, por favor"* ["We leave it in your hands, aunties, please"]. The *retaguardia* is in charge. The host provides final directives: have everything

[41] The *estudiantina* is a Spanish tradition involving students and stringed instruments playing in the streets that has been adapted here.

ready, pick up the hundred kilos of tortillas that were ordered at the neighborhood *tortillería,* finish setting the tables, and—the most difficult and controversial thing of all—do not let anyone into the house-lot garden. The family has decided at the last minute that it will be too difficult to manage the crowds in the narrow *callejón* and in their house-lot garden, so we should set up to serve the majority of the people at the first archway where the alley begins.

Figure 44: La parroquia

The women urge me to go to Mass, which they consider the principal ceremony today. I am more interested in the final food preparation that continues behind the scenes. In the end, I participate in both. Mass is a spectacular event, with many *Niños Dios* besides the Niñopa and many human babies and small children taken to Mass for blessing. Today is also the day that farmers take their seeds to be blessed. The church—*la parroquia*—courtyard is a spectacle this morning, with Mass held outdoors as in the services

held for Indians in colonial Mexico (Figure 44). A tarp has been put up to provide some shade, though entrepreneurs of all ages are making a killing selling paper hats and hand-held fans as well. I am struck by the syncretism evident here, the baby Jesus figures sitting in the same basket with the corn, the baby Jesus dressed in a broad array of traditional garb, including a chinelo outfit (Figure 45).

Figure 45: Niño Dios in basket of corn

I find a seat next to Marta, one of Doña Claudia's daughters, and we chat for a while before Mass begins. She tells me some of her family's stories of the Niñopa from the time her grandfather's brother was *mayordomo. "¡Como es de travieso el Niñopa!" s*he begins ["What a mischievous boy he is!"] *"Cuando el hermano de mi abuelo lo tenía, dejaba sus juguetes regados bajo el moises."* ["When my grandfather's brother had him, he would leave his toys strewn under his crib."] "And his shoes were scuffed in the morning!" Marta tells me that all the *Niños Dios* that are here this morning must have new clothes or at the very least newly washed clothes. The water from washing those clothes is special, and is sprinkled around the house-lot garden, much in the same way that the water from boiling the corn is sprinkled in the house-lot garden in some of my informants homes in this region.

I leave Mass early so as to participate in the final food preparation, only to find the women of the circle facing an unexpected problem: with only the older women left watching the pots and undertaking last-minute tasks, there is no one strong enough to move the rice. How to get the dozen huge and very heavy *cazuelas* from the yard to the entrance of the *callejón* where the food will be served? Several women are scrambling around looking for burlap sacks to put under each *cazuela* so that they can carry them between them without the risk of the handles breaking off and the rice spilling.

Here begins the final escapade of the day and probably the most fun I will have all year—despite my knowing full well that I will be seriously transgressing gender barriers. I had noticed a *triciclo* or bike with three wheels and a small platform in the house-lot garden that father and grandfather use every day to work with their animals and plants. I am aware of the scandal that will ensue when I offer to use the bike to transport the rice. Everyone is happy with the suggestion until they see that I actually intend to ride the bike rather than walk beside it and use it as a cart. Several older women offer to push it with me so that I do not have to straddle the seat, but time is really upon us and I decide to go ahead in the name of efficiency. Very American of me. Though bicycles and even bicycle taxis are very common in this town, in my years in Xochimilco I can only remember seeing one woman riding a bike alone.

The idea of women opening their legs is relatively scandalous among the older women. Just yesterday in Tetecala, Doña Eustoquia had shared her opinion of the young woman in her house, criticizing her for carrying her young daughter

with her legs wide open and wrapped around the mother. So, aware that I would make Bodoquepa history, I carted the *cazuelas* one by one down the alley past the people who stood outside their doorways to see the spectacle. Señora Rosa told me later that she heard the gossip before I even reached her door with the first load. Another young woman with a baseball cap joins me and together we move the rice in time for the feast, much to the collective relief and surprise.[42] Doña Nati, Raquel's mother, chuckles and pats my arm as I ride past her little store at the bridge. Another woman, who has recently chosen to greet me with a kiss when she sees me in town, offers to take a picture of me with my camera.

Later, after thousands of people have been fed in the street, those who want to visit the Niñopa in his new home line up and file into the *callejón*. Many are offended that they were not allowed in earlier: *"No se le debe decir que no a la gente que viene a ver el Niño, es una ofensa."* ["People who come to visit the Niño should never be turned away; that is offensive."]

Some fume at the ongoing wait as the security crew only allows a certain number in at a time, escorting them out before letting another group in. For the most part, however, people are astonishingly patient. Some of the neighbors from the *callejón* who were stuck on the wrong side of the makeshift barrier at the second archway for hours are upset that they were not informed of the change in

[42] While this woman was born in the neighborhood and told me she was from the *barrio*, I guessed from her dress and behavior that she was not. Later, other informants referred to her as the daughter of some people who had moved in to the barrio, stressing that she was not Xochimilca. People from the *barrio de la Asunción* are generally proud of their origins and take care to distance themselves both from the poor migrants from other parts of the country who find agricultural work on the chinampas, and the refugees from Mexico City who move in to escape the pace, price, and pollution of the city to some extent. The attitude exists even as people intermarry with outsiders, and is suffered by the latter, who are always aware that they are *not from here* even if they were only born a few blocks away.

plans. This will be the topic of heated neighborhood discussion for months, if not years.

Figure 46: Crowds waiting in line to enter to visit the Niñopa on February 2

For now, tensions are high at the third and final arch, as the young men who have been assigned to security try to keep older people out. These are people who have been visiting the Niñopa for longer than the makeshift guards have been alive, many of whom come from villages just outside of town or even further away. Social classes and ethnic groups mix here, with some indigenous people in traditional clothes among the crowds carrying their own *Niño Dios* and corn which they want to bring before the Niñopa (Figure 46).[43] Yet some Xochimilcas

[43] While Xochimilcas so clearly constitute an ethnic group that I was often able to successfully identify a person from Xochimilco in the middle of Mexico City, in general, they use the term *indio* in a pejorative sense, as many people do in Mexico when they feel their status is above that of indigenous people for whatever reason.

who feel they have a particular right to the Niñopa and are dressed very elegantly have heated discussions at the final archway. They expect preferential treatment, wanting not only immediate access to the altar, but to the dining tables set up in the house-lot garden. Names are checked against a master list, and in the end everyone who has come to see the Niñopa has a chance to come in, kneel before him in front of the hundreds of flower arrangements that have been placed at his feet, and then leave.

In the house-lot garden, meanwhile, the special guests participate in the ceremony transferring the responsibility for the appropriate care and celebration of the Niñopa's traditions from one *mayordomo* to the next, and formally introducing the new posaderos. My name is not on the list, but someone hisses at me, *"Pssst ¡Guerita, pásale!"* ["Blondie, come in!"]

February 26, 2001. "*Hoy cocinan los hombres!"* ["Today the men cook!"]

Tomorrow the *guías* are in charge of the *fiesta de Xaltocán*. Like the other groups, barrio*s* and *pueblos* of Xochimilco, they organize and finance the events for one day, beginning with a special Mass in the morning and ending with a meal for all in the streets. Today they are gathered to prepare the meal. The collection taken up to fund the event was five hundred pesos per member of the eighty-member organization of *guías* or tourist guides in Xochimilco. These are the men that wave you down, sometimes riding alongside of cars on their bicycles, asking if you are looking for *el embarcadero* [wharf] or *una trajinera* [festive canoe for

traveling in the canal].[44] That means a total of nearly US$4,500 for the party, not counting the *promesas* that people fulfill by bringing a contribution like the two hundred and fifty kilos of tortillas that are will be donated by devout followers of *la Virgen de los Dolores*. And, as several *guías* proudly told me today, no matter how much they prepare, there is never enough. People love their fiesta and flock to their *comida*. Theirs has historically been one of the best parties in the month-long celebration honoring the *Virgen de Xaltocán.*

Figure 47: Canal in Xochimilco

Apparently, this is an event where men break some gender barriers in food preparation, though by no means all. I was so interested in observing the guías cooking, that despite having just returned from the all-night hike to Chalma on a pilgrimage with informants from Ocotepec, I came to Xochimilco for the day. My knees were so sore I could hardly walk. I

[44] Xochimilco is a favorite for Mexican tourists not only from Mexico City but the whole country, the principal activities consisting of a ride in one of the traditional *trajineras* or special canoes that are decorated with flowers—now made of plastic—and take tourists along the canals (Figure 47). The tourist circuit involves travel on canals that are generally not the same that Xochimilcas who are involved in agriculture on the chinampas use. During their ride, which generally lasts for several hours, the passengers are approached by mariachis, food vendors, and others who approach the trajinera on a similar vessel. The guías make a commission for bringing tourists to the *trajineras* and generally work with specific boat owners with whom they have made previous arrangements.

took the opportunity to bring Señora Rosa's family the *cocoles* she had requested and that anyone from Xochimilco who goes to Chalma is expected to bring back.

Señora Josefina decided to accompany me to the preparations for the fiesta, which is one of her favorite pastimes. Like her mother, *la abuelita Daniela,* who never missed a local fiesta, walking around town and on pilgrimages to Chalma and other sites in her bare feet her entire life, Señora Josefina is, unlike Señora Rosa, the stereotypical Xochimilca: her black hair in braids and her apron on over her dress, she is always ready to participate in a collective event in the community. Despite her announcement at the beginning of my year of fieldwork that she would not participate in my research and that I should not expect to interview her, she was as always a very helpful interpreter and ambassador in social events like this one.

Señora Rosa's *compadre* Don Benjamín, who has been a *guía* for forty years in addition to his job as a clerk for the local government, asked his colleagues for permission to invite me to this event in *el barrio de Xaltocán*. When I arrived with Doña Josefina, he welcomed us at the door and proudly announced that I could take pictures of anything I wanted, something he had obviously cleared with his fellow guías. Stepping through the archway into the inner courtyard, I knew it was going to be a fruitful day.

Several neighbors in the barrio had told me about this event, the tour guides' day in the month-long Fiesta de Xaltocán. They knew I was studying cooking, and some understood I was looking at gender, so they thought I would be interested in an event that was traditional yet in which men were in charge of

the cooking. I was therefore surprised, when I discussed this with Don Benjamín last week, to learn that the men "do everything" but yet they have six women to "*guisar,"* a word which I had previously understood to mean "to cook." "*Los hombres hacen todo,"* he explained, ["the men do everything"]. They pay for things, carry things, chop things, prepare the meat, set the tables, serve the food—everything but make the rice or anything else that is *guisado*. In fact, the men do everything to the rice but cook it. They clean it, chop the carrots, peel the peas, prepare the tomatoes for grinding in a blender.

Figure 48: Men cleaning hibiscus for the Fiesta de Xaltocán

Women fry the rice in oil before adding the tomato puree, stir it and make sure it is seasoned right because, I learned today, they are the ones with *sazón*.

This was the secret ingredient in every successful dish, the *sazón* or seasoning[45] that gave food flavor. All year I had been hearing people say that the recipe is somewhat irrelevant, that each dish was different *según el sazón de cada quien*—depending on the personal touch of the cook. Today I learned that the magic and essential ingredient that made things taste right was, according to my informants, in women's hands, something that people in my other two sites would later confirm.

Yet as I found out, men were plenty expert at flavoring as well. I drank the first *pulque* that I liked in my life, one *curado* [cured] with plenty of fresh tangerine and many cans of sweetened condensed milk. I was told that the tomato-cured pulque that was on hand was amazing as well: it was served with hot sauce and lemon somewhat like *tequila* with *sangrita*. Later my neighbor Beatríz told me that those are the people who know—*ellos son los que saben*—those that know how to cure the pulque so that even people who do not like its slobbery texture or bitter taste will ask for more!

Don Fermín, the man who served me a glass of pulque from the pitcher, says he drank pulque instead of water ever since he was four years old. *Xochimilco antes era un lugar de pescado y de pulque* [Xochimilco used to be a place of fish and pulque], he said, lamenting the changes. The fish are mostly gone due to the city taking all the water and the young no longer drink pulque because they became *profesionistas* [professionals], he said, and because pulque smells too strongly afterwards on people's breath and is not tolerated in offices.

[45] Seasoning in this case is a verb, not a noun.

Later, others would tell me that young people prefer brandy because of the status associated with it.[46] Don Fermín told me the pulque I had drank on other occasions was a type cultivated and prepared in Huitzilac in Morelos. I was surprised at his accuracy, as it was not only from Huitzilac, but I had actually drunk it there! He said that was not the same pulque; that was *clachique* or young pulque made from *aguamiel*. The pulque preferred in Xochimilco was *pulque mexicano* or pulque cured in barrels or *pulquerías.* Some said you could tell a good pulque right away by the thread it left when it was served, but Don Fermín said you could also tell a good pulque by its name. Velasquez and Romero, for instance, were trusted names.

May 3, 2001. *Día de la Santa Cruz* [Day of the Holy Cross]

I visited Xochimilco briefly this morning before driving back to Ocotepec for *la comida de todos los barrios* [the meal of all the barrios] at Maria Teresa's. Today is *día de la Santa Cruz*, the day of the Holy Cross. It is also *el día del albañil* or the day people celebrate construction workers, cooking special food for them and giving the afternoon off, usually to get drunk. It is one of those days that I need to be in three places at once, especially the *barrio de la Santa Cruz*, one of the four barrio*s* of Ocotepec.

In the barrio in Xochimilco*,* new colored, plastic flags in the style of the traditional *papel picado* have been hung among the now tattered flags leftover

[46] Pulque is considered by most to be an indigenous drink, or something the older generation—*los antiguitos*—drank but that is not appropriate today. Pulque is often served, however, at traditional fiestas in Xochimilco, though often in a back room.

from the Niñopa reception in February. They were put up a couple of days ago for the barrio celebration of the *Día del Niño* or children's day April 30. Always a big day in the *callejón,* this year it brought thousands to see Xochimilco's favorite child of all, the Niñopa. Neighbors always set up food booths with miniature portions along the side of the alley; this year, Niñopa followers set up food booths as well. Señora Rosa was impressed with the amounts that were eaten. Beatríz made a killing selling her Niñopa candles.

Renewal. Fiesta upon fiesta, layers of color and sounds and smells. The slogans on local tourism progapanda are right: *"Xochimilco, siempre de fiesta!* Over 400 fiestas celebrated annually."[47] The town is always celebrating something. At the end of the *callejón* several men—young and old—are building a *torito,* a bull made of wire and fireworks to be burned later this evening in the *plaza de la Asunción* in front of the chapel. People will finish the day's celebration with the excitement of running to avoid the *buscapies* shooting on the ground and exploding at their feet. The man carrying the *torito* and running through the crowd might have the most fun of all. Somebody will most likely be burned, but if they are from Xochimilco they may show their scar with pride and come back the next time, maybe even carry the bull. If they are not, like the ex-boyfriend of *la comadre* Marcela's daughter who had his testicles burned in one such event, they are likely to never return, and not understand why anyone would want to run such *barbarian* risks.

[47] "Over 400 annual festivities are celebrated in this entity with respect and veneration resulting thanks to diverse Cultural, Religious, and Political reasons" reads the government flier (Delegación Xochimilco).

Like the bullfights in Spain, Xochimilco's traditions are hard for outsiders to comprehend. Here, the degree and pace of celebration is so intense that "outsiders" includes most people not from the local barrio*s*. The government, despite the accidents that occur every year, has not been able to stop the fireworks. Few politicians are stupid enough to risk their political career trying, despite the ban in Mexico City on sales and indiscriminate burning. In Xochimilco, as in Ocotepec and most traditional *pueblos* in Mexico, *los cohetes* are a crucial ingredient in any celebration and definitely a site of cultural resistance. Untouchable.

Chapter Five: Fiestas and the House-lot Garden, Ocotepec

Known for its celebration of the Day of the Dead as well as the posadas preceding Christmas, each of the four barrios in Ocotepec celebrates its own patron saint in the annual "*fiesta del barrio*" as well as the "*fiesta del pueblo*" that they all have in common (Figure 49). In addition, each barrio formally participates in the barrio fiestas of the other three, as well as over thirty fiestas including the celebration of the town's patron saint, San Salvador, on August 6. Locals are proud of their community's traditions, (Díaz 1995, von Mentz de Boege 1995) which have become more familiar to outsiders thanks in part to a series of television programs on the days of the dead and Easter festivities produced in conjunction with the state school of anthropology and history [48]

Fiestas in the community are very complex and include a series of ritualized visits by representatives of other barrios and neighboring communities both in preparation for the celebration and during the event itself. On each of these occasions, the host barrio receives the visitors with a special meal. When requesting permission to participate in the festivities, the outside guests leave their *estandarte*[49] in the host barrio, only to retrieve them on a yet another visit, again celebrated with food. The new *compadres* and *comadres* from each town meet and share food, as do the old ones from previous years.

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[48] Miguel Morayta, resident of Ocotepec and historian at the Morelos Escuela de Antropología e Historia, is widely credited for his television program on local customs and celebrations and his research on the complex barrio organizations for *mayordomía*s in this community.
[49] Banner with name and symbol of barrio.

This section is based on my participant-observation in two of these celebrations: Palm Sunday and the day of the Holy Cross.

Figure 49: Day of the Dead offering in Ocotepec

March 25, 2001. The barrio de los Ramos two weeks before Palm Sunday

With Palm Sunday only two weeks away, I intend to find a group of women in Ocotepec's neighborhood of that name—*el barrio de los Ramos*—who will allow me to participate in their food preparation for this community celebration. Los Ramos is one of the four barrios in this town, the second on the north side of the road that cuts through the Ocotepec leading from Cuernavaca to

Tepoztlán. Knowing that the chapel representatives meet every Sunday at 8 a.m., I drag my youngest son out of bed and head out, hoping they can point me in the right direction.

We drive up the street of Francisco I. Madero to a brightly colored chapel that is the outstanding point in the immediate landscape. I ask a man and a woman standing outside of their house next to the chapel if they know where I can find the people in charge of cooking for the upcoming fiesta. The barrio representatives just left, they say, and the man runs to the corner and whistles at four men walking two blocks away on the dirt road leading away from the chapel. They can not hear him, but another man closer to them does and in turn calls out to them. In that first welcoming encounter with *los Ramos*, the barrio appears as a network, a whole made up of individual but synchronized parts.

We catch up to the men, who surprise me by assuming that I intend to work –lend service—to the group for the upcoming fiesta: *"Va a usted a prestar servicio?"* ["Are you going to lend service?"] This strikes me as unusual and positive because in Xochimilco I was only allowed to join the group of women and *prestar servicio* or lend service in the preparation for the Niñopa's fiesta after years of prior residence and months of direct offer! Yet in Ocotepec, perhaps due to the many newcomers that have bought up land in the community and are interested in supporting local traditions, many neighbors that I interact with this morning assume that I am seeking to contribute money or work for the upcoming fiesta.

Before I find the chapel representatives on top of the hill—*el Cerro de la Cruz*—cleaning a plot of land with a cross on top, it seems the whole barrio is aware of our presence. I explain that I am a student studying *las tradiciones en la comida* [food traditions] and that I would like to help with the work of preparing food for the upcoming celebration on Palm Sunday.

On top of the hill overlooking Ocotepec, and below that, Cuernavaca, an older man comes forward to receive us. Right away he offers the information that there are four *mayordomos* in charge as well as several other key organizers for the upcoming celebration. He does not know who is in charge of food this year because many people participate. There is a list, he says, with different families signed up for different meals or portions of meals, like the rice, the breakfast, or the dinner for the musicians, for instance. It is too much for one family, he adds. When I say that I want to help with the food, he asks: *"Usted tiene un predio por acá?"* ["Do you have a plot around here?"] He seems to assume I belong to the neighborhood somehow and want to take responsibility for an entire meal.

I clarify that I want to provide labor in support of a meal that somebody else is hosting, and that I am a student studying food preparation. He gives me Doña Rosalinda's name. She hosted a comida last year and will know the many people who have that responsibility this time around. She can direct you to the right women, he says, and may even allow me to help her cook this year. *Dígale que la envió los representantes de la capilla.* [Tell her the church representatives sent you.] I am in luck.

I arrive at Rosalinda Carrillo's house: it is new, with two stories made out of adobe bricks and a *carnicería* [butcher shop] and a *tortillería* on the edge of the lot. Doña Rosalinda is out for the day. The women in the meat shop ask each other who is in charge of cooking this year: Is it Doña Leti or Doña Laura? They do not know and tell me that I should return in the morning.

I leave with a curiosity about how this growing town with shrinking cornfields maintains its traditions. It seems that in all three towns I am visiting, outsiders sometimes play a key role in traditions, be they rural immigrants from indigenous communities in Xochimilco and Tetecala, or city refugees in Cuernavaca. They come eager to belong and adopt a local identity to which they contribute resources of different types. In the case of Tetecala, an outsider is the motor behind the organization of the annual fiesta celebration.

March 26, 2001. Meeting the cousins and Doña Rosalinda

Back at Rosalinda Rendon's house this morning, I chat with her cousins: Susana—*la guera*—who has long blond hair hanging down her back and wears jeans, and Doña Adelita, with two tight black braids and wearing an apron over her dress. The latter is sweeping the *traspatio* [house-lot garden], but edges closer, interested in talking about food and traditions.

Doña Rosalinda lot runs up against Susana's lot at the back. About five kids between the ages of four and thirteen run around us in the yard. The introduction from the chapel representative is very important, but in Ocotepec's case, it is the town's pride and reputation around their celebration of Palm Sunday

and especially *Semana Santa* [Holy Week] that opens doors to discussions on town life and food traditions. It is really no surprise to anyone that a student should come to ask about cooking in this town.

The family has a long history of cooking for Palm Sunday. *"Huy, eso viene desde muy antes"* ["That comes from way back"], says Doña Adelita when I ask how long their family has been cooking for Domingo de Ramos. *"No ha cambiado"* ["It has not changed"], she responds when I ask if anything has changed. *"Aquí es el mole, esa es la tradición."* ["*Mole* is the thing here, that is the tradition."] When I mention that in Xochimilco *mole* is traditional but increasingly replaced with meat in many festivities because of the cost of chile, she softens her stance and says another thing I often hear: *"Lo que uno pueda dar."* ["Whatever one can give,"] meaning any offering is well received. But, she says, in their house, even if they served *pancita*[50] in the morning, there was *mole* for the mid-day meal later.

I realize then that people may be anxious to talk to me about their *tradiciones,* but are often apprehensive and defensive about my observing any deterioration or loss, with change synonymous with loss or failure**.** For instance, when I met the woman who cooks year after year for an annual town fiesta in Tetecala, her first words were a type of embarrassed apology for not preparing the food according to tradition. It is a double-edged sword to inquire about traditions, opening doors, but tightening the discourse. In any case, there is no way a complete stranger will lead me into their kitchen and tell me what and how they

[50] Pancita is tripe, something that is prepared in a soup and is a much less expensive meal than mole. It is the meal prepared by a neighbor for the first collective meal of the Palm Sunday series of celebrations.

cook for their family: food preparation for community celebrations usually take place in the more public sphere of the garden and is definitely the place to start if I want to establish relationships that will bring me closer to everyday cooking in the kitchen.

The cousins explain that different families are asked by the church committee to receive different *promesas* or pilgrims that have ongoing commitments and relationships with the local celebration, and who come from other neighborhoods inside and outside of Ocotepec. They mention San Francisco in Estado de Mexico, Xochimilco, and the other three barrios of Ocotepec, as examples of places that send special emissaries that are formally received with a meal.

Doña Adelita stresses that they do this out of faith. *"Primero Dios, luego nosotros. Si Dios nos da licencia, aquí estamos para colaborar."* ["First God, then us. If God grants us life and the means to collaborate, we are willing to collaborate."] Her hands on her heart, her eyes dreamy, her face blissful, she expresses that it is out of love–*es por amor*—that people continue the tradition. No wonder any perceived loss of tradition is such an emotional thing! I remember the work on a Nahuatl village in Guerrero and how the concepts of *love and respect* and *work* are intertwined, with *work* including energy contributed by the living and the dead, clouds and soil, and where *love* necessarily implies a practical contribution to helping somebody out (Goode 2001a). It does not seem that Ocotepec and Xochimilco are far from those concepts, at least on in relation to community festivities.

I am about to leave to talk to Doña Laura, up the street, when Rosalinda arrives, walking up the dusty street carrying her *mandado* or groceries from the market, in one of those colorful vinyl bags that women commonly use for grocery shopping. Obviously tired and busy, she is nonetheless very kind and invites me to return that afternoon at five to join her and the group of women who are meeting in another house to work on the decorations for the chapel. She also tells me that they start preparing food this coming Thursday and Friday. The group always meets in the afternoon, after all the women have gone to the market and taken care of cooking for their families. I am welcome to come help, she says.

March 29, 2001. Visit to the home of Doña Rosalinda—first real conversation

It has been a long day, but I drive straight from the gender/environment seminar at the UNAM in Mexico City to Rosalinda's house in Ocotepec at 4 p.m. With Palm Sunday barely over a week away, I can not afford to go home. I find Doña Rosalinda eating with her family. Bad timing, but it is the first day I am free, and I am getting ever more persistent as the year goes on. Reminding Rosalinda that she had said to come Thursday and Friday afternoon, I tell her I set up childcare so as to come as scheduled. She says if I give her ten minutes we can have a brief conversation. I am heading out to my car to read while I wait when she invites me into her house and offers me a glass of water while they finish eating. At the table sit Doña Rosalinda, her younger son, her elderly mother, and the cousin, Doña Adelita. Doña Rosalinda offers me a *taco.* I am in the door, so to speak.

After the women clear the table, I join the circle and help peel tamarindo, the beginnings of the preparation for the family feast on Palm Sunday. Little do I know then that I would later be in charge of making the *agua de tamarindo* for that day myself!

I try to explain my research, the purpose of my visit. Knowing Ocotepec's tradition of opposition to encroachment from nearby Cuernavaca, I explain my work from the perspective of food traditions as rural resistance to urban growth, as in the case of towns on the outskirts of big cities, like Ocotepec to Cuernavaca and Xochimilco to Mexico. Rosalinda understands the angle and chimes in: *"Es más que nada que la ciudad no se coma a un pueblo, que no nos invada la ciudad."* ["It is more than anything about not letting the city eat this town up, about the city not invading us."] She wants to be sure I am aware of the town's struggle against the *Soriana* supermarket that some people (including the governor) want to build on *tierras de Ocotepec* [Ocotepec lands] and of their successful struggle against a gasoline station the city tried to open there earlier (Figure 2). I had, of course, heard of both, the first an ongoing issue still making headlines every day, the latter reduced to a landmark, with an abandoned PEMEX gas station at the edge of town that was built and never opened for service.

Rosalinda gives me a detailed explanation of the preparation for the upcoming fiesta. She very much wants me to stop peeling tamarinds and take notes as she speaks and tells me several times that I do not need to help. I peel some, write some, and try to explain that one way to understand something is to actually do it. I stress that I want to help prepare the food for the party. She gives

up and continues, explaining her enthusiasm: *"Nos gusta que den a conocer nuestras tradiciones por otro lado."* ["We like it when people make our traditions known in other places."]

The *patrón del pueblo* [patron saint] of Ocotepec, she tells me, is San Salvador, the name of the main church, therefore the festival for Ocotepec as a whole is August 6. Then there are the barrio fiestas: May 3 is the *barrio de Santa Cruz*; *la Candelaria* celebrates February 2; *los Ramos* or *Tlagoapan* celebrates on Palm Sunday. Rosalinda knows the original Nahuatl name of her own barrio, but can not recall the original name of the other two older barrios of Ocotepec, which she considers important for me to write down. She calls her cousin—Doña Adelita— to tell me. *"El barrio de la Candelaria se llama en mexicano Tlalnihuic,"* she says. ["The name of la Candelaria in Mexican is Tlalnihuic."] Conversation turns to which barrios throw the best party. Rosalinda says that Culhuacan has the prettiest of all fiestas these days, though about seven years ago it was the Candelaria. Santa Cruz and this barrio's fiestas are *"chiquitos"* [small], though she says things are getting better thanks in part to the work of Rosalinda and her group of women in the church. Clearly there is a friendly competition between the barrio*s* to outdo each other in their celebrations. *"Hay mucha competencia*" ["There is lots of competition"], according to Rosalinda.

Los Ramos is the smallest barrio of the four, and used to have the smallest fireworks display. As in the *callejón Bodoquepa* in Xochimilco, young people have organized their own groups to maintain or create traditions that bring in traditional elements including fireworks, pilgrimages and rosaries. The latter

includes food and drink served after prayer. All of these traditions revolve around a religious figure.

> *"Este barrio es el más chico, el más grande es la Candelaria. Por ser chiquito el barrio nuestro castillo era tan chiquito que se nos apagaba con el agua. Era puro humo. Pero ahora hay un grupo para el castillo, hicieron promesa de cinco años. Tienen su santito y todo."*
>
> ["This is the smallest barrio, the biggest is Candelaria. Because it is the smallest barrio our fireworks display was so small the rains would put it out. It was all smoke. But now there is a group for the fireworks, they made a five-year promise. They have their own saint and everything."]

Like Antonio's group of young men in Xochimilco who just started their own *grupo chalmero* to walk across the mountains carrying a recently crafted figure of Jesus on their backs to Chalma every year, this is run by young guys. They have to take care of their holy image with the expected, regular worship consisting mostly of rosaries at different people's house and which must be accompanied by food and drink. It is clear that young males' involvement alongside the old keep these traditions going. The *castillo* group Rosalinda talks about started three years ago, with some men starting it and later putting their sons in charge. *"Ahora están sacando un castillo bueno, no de humo,"* she says proudly. ["Now they have a good fireworks display, not a smoke display."]

Rosalinda provides lots of detail on the many groups in each chapel that plan, organize and finance the different aspects of the fiestas in the barrios. Each barrio has its group of young people, but in addition they participate in various groups. Her two sons are an example: one is very involved in a committee that requires lots of time and labor; the older one who has a paying job prefers to be

involved in a group that requires more money and less time from him—the one that brings the *castillo* or fireworks tower to the barrio celebration.

One peculiar group of relatively older people is ironically called the *grupo juvenil* [youth group]. As young people twenty-two or twenty-three years ago, they added a new element from Mexican popular culture to the Domingo de Ramos tradition: a wrestling match. A few years ago, they raised the funds to purchase their own ring that they now assemble each year on the empty lot across from the chapel and in front of Rosalinda' house. Rosalinda says proudly that they started with only a *torito*—a fireworks bull that is carried on someone's shoulders and spins *buscapiés* into the crowd—and now they have a wrestling match. Her son once had the excitement and honor of carrying the bull: like many before him, he was burned when a *buscapiés* went in his pants leg.

There is also a group in charge of the *arco de las flores* [the arch of flowers]. The men have been working together to build the arch for about forty years; *ahora le estan enseñando a sus hijos* [Now they are teaching their sons]. Carrying these traditions forward is not just about labor and money, it is also skill, as manifested by the beautiful archway of fresh flowers welcoming visitors to the barrio on Palm Sunday (Figure 50).

Figure 50: Flower arch marks entrance to the barrio de los Ramos

There is also the *grupo de los chinelos de Miguel Izquierdo* [chinelo group sponsored by a neighbor man]. She tells me he lives next to Miguel Morayta, the historian who lives in this neighborhood too. Morayta's series of documentaries about the traditions in Ocotepec—including Palm Sunday and the Days of the Dead, have attracted many outside visitors. The chinelo group is about fifteen years old and is also in charge of bringing the musicians to the fiesta.

There was a *grupo de la mojiganga*[51] that lasted three years but quit for lack of money. Then there is the *grupo de los toros de Sergio Mendoza.* Rosalinda says they bring the bulls, look for *caporales* [managers], and make *agua loca* [crazy water], which she describes as similar to *agua de jamaica* but full of cane alcohol. She says they feed lots of people, more men than women. They also have to bring a musical band for the bullring. Each of the groups has to cover its own costs—which they can do by fundraising or, usually, by dividing the costs among

[51]This involved huge, giant-like figures in street parades, something which is part of the community celebrations in Tetecala.

themselves. No wonder the community is eager for newcomers to help share the costs of their celebration, I think to myself.

"Nosotras somos del grupo femenil" ["We are from the women's group"], says Rosalinda, referring to herself, her cousin, and a neighbor who has also been helping us peel tamarind and shell peanuts for the *mole*. But Rosalinda is involved with several other groups also, contributing to all of them with labor, time, and money, as well as her obvious leadership and organizing ability. Her younger son has been with the group that builds the flower arch for a year. He gives not only his work but also 200-250 pesos *cooperación.* Like her wrestling group, the *grupo de las luchas,* they have their own Christ figure whom they honor with flowers and candles on a given day.

The *grupo femenil* [women's group] was formed only three years ago by fifteen women or so *"porque no nos gustó el adorno que los señores hacían, era muy anticuado, triste. Queríamos algo más alegre."* ["We did not like the decorations the men made for the chapel; they were old-fashioned and sad. We wanted something more festive."] Resistance through change—a group formed precisely to change things and carry on the tradition in a new way. But it was not easy. One problem was the money: they had counted on a person who left Ocotepec—as so many do—to work in the U.S. The person had promised to send 10,000 pesos and then sent only 5,000, explains Rosalinda, approximately $555 dollars. Rosalinda, her niece and that person started the group. Rosalinda and another *"compadre que se va a Estados Unidos"* ["A *compadre* who goes to the US"], a regular, temporary migrant, had to come up with extra money and cover

the contract they had already signed with a band from the nearby state of Mexico. Somehow they had to come up with the money to fulfill the commitment. She counts in her head and concludes the cost was about 18,000 pesos or $2,000 dollars: her niece put in 5,000 pesos; Rosalinda contributed 4,000; they got 5,000 from the guy in the States. Then the group who build the arch gave 2,000; the *compadre* from the states gave 1,000, and somehow they rounded up another 1,000. *"Yo ya había firmado ese contrato con la banda!"* ["I had already signed the contract with the band!"]

The extensive organizing and fundraising to fulfill the commitment made to the musicians last year was only the beginning: the band also had to be housed and fed during their stay in Ocotepec. There were fifteen musicians and another ten carrying their things. *"Y los que se pegaron"* ["And the ones that came along with them"], bringing the total to thirty-five. They arrived the Saturday prior to the fiesta.

> *"Había que buscarles hospedaje. Doña Laura les dió hospedaje, mi sobrina les dió de comer el sábado, el domingo Laura dió el desayuno (café) y el almuerzo (caldo de pollo y arroz). Yo les di la comida, pollo con jitomate porque dijeron que no les diera mole porque les hace daño para tocar. Aparte yo mato un marrano, y lo hago en mole rojo."*
>
> ["We had to find a place for them to stay. Doña Laura housed them, my niece fed them the main meal on Saturday; Sunday Laura gave them breakfast (coffee) and lunch (chicken soup and rice). I gave the main meal that day, chicken in tomato, because they said they did not want *mole* as it did not sit well with them when they played. In addition, I butcher a pig[52] that I make with red *mole*."]

[52] The pig weighed 120 kilos. While Rosalinda did not raise it, it was purchased from somebody in the neighborhood who did.

This year Rosalinda will make *mole* again, using chili she purchased in September when she was going to open a store. The store never got off the ground, and now she is glad to have at least one part of the cost of the meal already covered. She will make the principal mid-day meal—*la comida*—and also a dinner, which she does every year.

Rosalinda draws on multiple strategies for funding the festivities, including making her purchases where she can get better prices at bulk rate. Another unexpected strategy this year was a debt that a political party had with her. She said she was working with a political party and that they told her if they won they would give her something—*"quedamos que si ganaban me ofrecían algo."* She asked for support with purchasing building materials for her house. When they failed to come through on that petition she asked for musicians for the fiesta! She has the musicians for three hours that day. Of course she will be feeding them—*"les voy a dar de comer."*

Now the grupo femenil has fifteen members; each is asked for one hundred and fifty pesos a piece. Not all contribute, however, Rosalinda says, some give only one hundred. *"Ya compramos adornos artificiales a $1,800 pesos. Aparte hicimos flores de papel con popote."* ["We purchased 1,800 pesos (US$200) of artificial decorations; in addition we made flowers made of paper and plastic straws."] All that was missing was their fireworks. *"Nos faltaban dos docenas de cohetones de silbato para anunciar que vamos."* ["We were missing two dozen whistling rockets to announce that we were coming."] Somehow, they scraped together more money for the indispensable fireworks.

March 30, 2001. *Quinto Viernes de Cuaresma* (5th Friday of Lent). Dinner for the first *promesa* at the home of Doña Livoria Gomez Puerto

Doña Rosalinda had told me that cooking would begin *en serio* the Thursday and Friday a week before Palm Sunday and that I should come help. I showed up early Friday evening after a long day in Tetecala and easily found the yard where she had told me the women would be making *tortillas* for the dinner: *el portón negro* –the black gate—on the left, the next street down from hers.

The evening is important because this is the first official meal offered as part of the barrio festivities revolving around *el Señor de los Ramos,* the patron saint of the neighborhood chapel. The figure or *imagen* is about eighteen inches high and sits on a little donkey carrying palms in the front of the chapel. It is a representation of Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Figure 57). Like other *imágenes* throughout Mexico, people come from different towns and barrio*s* to pay homage to him, bringing flowers, candles or fireworks. Here, they are welcomed to share a meal with different hosts in the barrio. Visitors and residents alike, *gente creyente* [believers] believe that *Cristo* rewards their intense devotion and *promesas* with miracles and support in their lives. Here, as in Xochimilco, people make a point to tell me that their *Cristo* is a representation of the one and only Christ: *es el mismo* [It is the same one]. They are aware that the intense devotion surrounding an image differentiates them from the non-Catholic *sectas* that are increasingly taking hold in Mexico, and that their traditions have drawn criticism from these as well as from the hierarchy of the Catholic church.

This evening Rosalinda and some of her crew from the women's group are gathered to help the hostess of the dinner make tortillas. Because the *tortillas* are made the traditional way—by hand and over a wood fire—Rosalinda was very enthusiastic and insistent that I join them tonight and that I take pictures of the activities for her as well.

When I knock on the black gate and ask for Doña Rosalinda, I am ushered past the long tables that have been set up in the yard that stretches out along one side of the adobe house. I can see and smell the wood fire as I walk up, and the sweet smell of fresh-ground corn *tortillas* toasting on the *comal*. A half dozen women are working in the yard, some making *tortillas*, other preparing the *pancita* for the evening. Still others are running around setting the tables, making sure the condiments—chopped onion, lemons, toasted *chile de arbol*, and salt—are on each. This meal, like others—*desayunos, almuerzos, comidas, cenas* [breakfasts, lunches, the main meal, dinner]—are part of the neighborhood's support for *las promesas,* whereby folks receive pilgrims who have come to fulfill their promise to *el Señor de los Ramos* by visiting him and contributing to his celebration with their presence, prayers, and gifts.

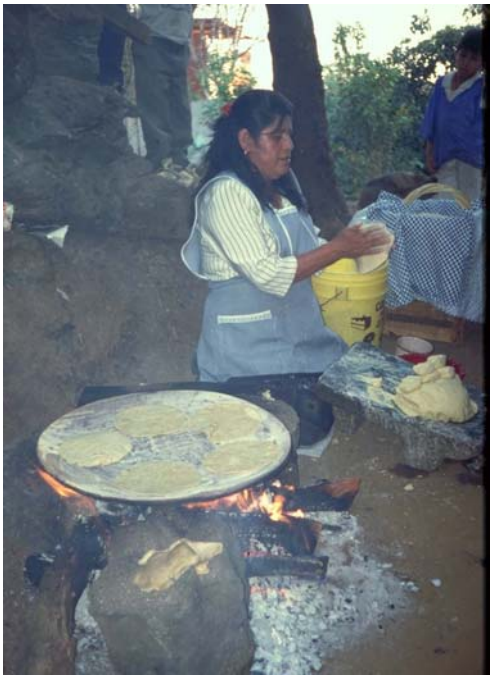

Figure 51: Making tortillas on a clay comal

The children who open the gate send me to the very back of the yard where Doña Rosalinda and several other women are making tortillas behind a little shack. They use a metal *tortillera* to flatten little balls of *masa* that they first make with their hands. Then Rosalinda' s sister, sitting on the ground next to the fire stretches them a bit between her hands before laying them on the *comal de barro* [clay comal]. Ocotepec is the only place of my three sites where I find *comales de barro*—of the traditional clay—apparently because vendors come here to sell them door to door (Figure 51). They are not only easily accessible, but not considered too expensive (thirty five pesos, or about four U.S. dollars).

I take photos as Rosalinda had requested and am then sent to talk to the oldest woman here, the hostess, who is making *tortillas* on the other wood fire. She piles the hot *tortillas* in baskets and covers them with cloth napkins and plastic bags to keep them warm until the guests arrive. Again I am struck at the role of plastic bags—to keep heat and vapor in—in *traditional* cooking in Mexico today!

This evening I am aware of the diversity of women preparing food for the dinner. Ranging in age from about eighteen through sixty-five, some look relatively well-off, with gold jewelry and fancy polyester suits, while others wear flip-flops and ragged mismatched clothes. Most have short hair, perhaps because it is a relatively young crew, but a few older women have the traditional long hair. Not all wear aprons. Some are neighbors and some are family. All are working together to receive the *promesa* appropriately and do honor to the host family and barrio.

This particular evening the dinner is for the godfather or *padrino del Señor de los Ramos*. I am surprised to learn that this important role is not rotated, that it has been in the same family as long as anybody can remember. Doña Livoria Gómez Puerto, the hostess, (who tells me she was born in 1943) says that the current *padrino* is the son of the previous *padrino*. The family is responsible for *el Señor de los Ramos* on his day: they bring his flowers, music, fireworks and pay for the Mass. Unlike some of the huge commitments in Xochimilco, that last the entire year (the *mayordomías* of the major figures like the Niñopa, the Niño de Belen, and others) and that have families sign a waiting list for years in the future to host the figure, Ocotepec seems more like Tetecala where the tradition stays in the same family. Here, in the *barrio de los Ramos*, different families take turns preparing the meal for these padrinos and the musicians and whoever else is accompanying them. Tonight the women are preparing food for fifty people.

Different families will receive other *promesas* throughout the week. They come from places that people in this barrio will visit in turn when they have their

annual fiestas, taking their own *promesas*. They too will be received with meals and hospitality on their visit. This neighborhood will receive *promesas* from San Francisco, Estado de Mexico; from Tlanepantla, Puebla; *la Magdalena Contreras* (one of the *delegaciones*) in Mexico City, in addition to the other three barrio*s* from Ocotepec. I ask how long the reciprocal relationship with San Francisco has existed, since it is the first place everyone in this neighborhood mentions in their slightly different but overlapping lists of who visits for Domingo de Ramos. Doña Livoria thinks back for a minute before responding that it has been about twenty-five years. Magdalena Contreras, another favorite, has been coming for about eighteen or twenty years, bringing flowers, candles, money, and flower holders. When this barrio goes to Mexico City for the reciprocal visit on May 15 to celebrate the *Virgen de la Fátima* with them, they take *chinelos* to honor their friends in Magdalena Contreras, bringing what people have come to expect from the state of Morelos. Doña Livoria tells me *chinelos* are from Tepoztlán, as most people say, despite Tlayacapan's official claim. In any case, it seems that *chinelos* are present at all the traditional fiestas in this region, from Xochimilco to Tetecala! Doña Livoria says less people from los Ramos went to Contreras this year because the bus fare went up—*"ya fueron menos porque está caro el pasaje."*

Figure 52: Kneading *masa* on the *metate*

As I sit with Doña Livoria talking while she makes tortillas without interruption, the women around are rushing to finish preparing the meat, cutting the *pancita* into small pieces (Figure 52). Someone comments with pride that it is a whole stomach, and Livoria responds that it is fresh from *la Carolina*, the market preferred by many women in this neighborhood. The central market freezes and sells old meat—*carne vieja*—the women tell me, while *"en el mercado de la Carolina*, *se vende la carne del día"* ["at the Carolina market, they sell fresh meat killed that day"].

The women are in a festive mood, even before they serve themselves a drink of *brandy Presidente*—a favorite rum that men and women alike often drink with cola. They gather around the bottle in a hurry when the guests begin to arrive, saying the servers must be served first. They mention *las chimoleras,* and laugh heartily when they see me write the word down, saying it is their own invention: they call the women who make *mole chimoleras*, but only here in Ocotepec! Anyway, they say that *las chimoleras* must have a drink for the *mole* to cook—"*tienen que tomar un trago para que se coza el mole." Mole* is tricky and it must cook slowly but never boil or scorch. *"Y si hay música tienen que bailar*

alrededor de la cazuela," they tell me. ["If there is music, the cooks must also dance around the pot!"]

One story leads to another, and as usual the women tell me that the tamales will not cook right if people fight or argue. *"Los tamales se hacen locos si se pelean—unos se hacen y otros están crudos."* ["Tamales will come out crazy if there is fighting, some will be done and others will be raw."] I ask them if this is a *creencia*—a belief—or if it is true. No doubt about it, they all chime in: *"Es cierto, hemos visto!"* ["It is true, we have seen it!"]

I ask the women how important cooking is in Ocotepec. They seem to think this a strange question. *"Si no cocinan no hay fiesta!"* they respond. ["If no one cooks there is no fiesta."] After I ask that question, they seem to conclude I am of alien culture and look at me curiously. One woman ask: *"Usted es católica o es hermana?"* ["Are you Catholic or a sister?"] I say I am Catholic of course, and they all burst out laughing, teasing the woman who so diplomatically said "*hermana"* in reference to Protestants. They all let loose criticizing the Evangelicals in their community who they say do not host these fiestas at which food is the center, but yet often come to eat. *"No hacen fiesta, no toman, no bailan, pero sí comen."* ["They do not have parties, they do not drink, they do not dance, but they do eat."] The women seem particularly upset that people who join the new *sects* criticize their behavior, do not contribute, but do consume. Worst of all, they say, they do not fulfill barrio obligations: *"No cumplen."* I ask if there is a non-Catholic chapel in Ocotepec. The response: *"Ni lo mande Dios!"* ["God forbid!"]

Our conversation takes place among curious kids, hanging around eating freshly-made warm tortillas. They giggle and shyly ask about my camera. Suddenly we hear the *cohetes* announce that the *promesa* has left the main church on the other side of the main road three blocks away and is heading our way to the barrio chapel. *"Ya están las mesas?"* somebody asks, ["Are the tables ready?"] There is a flurry of activity as the women work together to finish setting the tables. Before we know it the tables are full of guests and we even have to give up our cooking table. The wind band that accompanied the procession keeps playing, standing around the edges of the house-lot garden outside the tables.

When I leave shortly thereafter, though not before having eaten my bowl of pancita along with other women who helped cook, I walk through the feasting guests to the other end of the yard by the gate. I am struck by the gendered space, the spatial segregation. At one end of the yard, in the back, are the cooks, all women cooking, laughing, drinking. In the middle at the tables, a mixed crowd, the special guests, young and old, male and female, musicians, dancers. At the other end by the gate are all men, drinking and talking. They stop talking, surprised, when I come through. *"Y esa guera?"* they ask each other. ["Who's that blondie?"] *"Ay mamacita*," someone mutters. ["Little mother," or rather, "hot momma."] Boy, *mother* is everything in this matriarchal society, even a sex object!

March 30, 2001. Doña Livoria's reflections on change

> *"Antes las señoras tenían diez hijos o quince, pero se morían—de tosferina, de empacho, de sarampión. Ahora ya no, se vacunan. Antes los*

pañales eran de pedazos de tela, de delantales viejos, de pantalones, ahora son desechables! Ahora hasta los perros y los gatos—no solo los niños—están vacunados!"

["Women used to have ten or fifteen kids only to have most of them die of disease. Before the diapers were made of rags, old aprons and pants. Now they are disposable! Today even cats and dogs—not just children—are vaccinated!"]

Doña Livoria paints a picture of how changes in Ocotepec have benefited women. She refers to vaccinations, tells me women used to have to make diapers from old aprons. Even corn and beans have changed, she offers without my asking.

"Antes se comía puros frijoles, la tortilla era siempre de mano, de cuartillo. Ahora los frijoles no son de diario, los niños ya casi no les gusta. A ellos les gusta la sopa aunque sea con una alita o mollejita."

["Before we ate only beans, the tortillas were always hand-made, measured by *cuartillo* (meaning boiled in lime at home). Now we do not eat beans every day, the kids hardly like them anymore. They like their soup, with a little chicken wing or gizzard in it at least."]

Unlike in Xochimilco, where people in the old days pretty much lived off their vegetables and corn, according to Doña Livoria, nobody in Ocotepec ate vegetables here except during Lent. More recently, they eat more vegetables, as opposed to the trend in Xochimilco where meat is replacing vegetables to a great extent in the younger generations.

"Aquí nadie comía verdura, solo en las vigilias, se comía coliflor, huauzontle. Ahora se come más verdura. Yo hago ejotes–en huevo, en tortas, en salsa. Se comen los nopales."

["Nobody here used to eat vegetables except for Lent, when cauliflower, huauzontle was eaten. Now we eat more vegetables—with eggs, in sandwiches, in salsa. We eat *nopales*."]

And squash I ask? *"La calabaza se comía más, si, pero solamente cuando se cosechaba el maíz, una vez al año, en septiembre, pues se sembraba entre el elote."* ["Yes, squash we ate more of, but only at the time of the corn harvest, in September, as it was grown in the traditional *milpa* between rows of corn."]

Doña Livoria is glad not to have to make tortillas by hand—at least not for everyday meals—for both time and money reasons.

> *"Ya no hago tortillas, mejor en tortillería. Ahora porque es cena y las tortillerías estan cerradas. Se gasta en la leña, cincuenta palos por $60 pesos. Es mucho más caro y tardado: hay que comprar el cuartillo, poner el nixtamal, pagar el molino. Cobran diez pesos por moler diez cuartillos."*
>
> ["I do not make tortillas; better to go to the *tortillería.* Today is an exception because it is dinner and the *tortillerías* are closed.[53] You spend money on the firewood, fifty sticks for sixty pesos. It is much more expensive and takes longer: you have to buy your measure of corn, put it to boil with lime, pay the mill to grind it. They charge ten pesos to grind ten cuartillos."]

Doña Livoria has not ground corn by hand—on *metate*—since 1959. *"Yo molía a metate; tenía como dieciséis años cuando dejé de moler porque me fui a estudiar corte y confección a Cuernavaca."* ["I used to grind corn on the *metate*. I was about sixteen when I stopped because I went to Cuernavaca to study sewing."] Like Domingo Díaz' wife who was just a little bit older, though probably around the same date, she started taking sewing classes in the city to learn to make clothes for her family. *"Para hacerse la ropa, pues uno no*

[53] While buying tortillas at a commercial tortilla factory or *tortillería* may be acceptable for a fiesta in Ocotepec, reheating them is not. Thus, while tortillas are often purchased for the mid-day meal, hand-made tortillas are often still made for dinners.

trabajaba y había que hacerse la ropa." ["It was the way to get clothes, since women did not work and had to make their own clothes."]

She sees many changes in women's lives as positive, including their increasingly working for a wage. When she was young, she says, the only women who worked outside of the house before were those who made and sold tortillas. *"No tenían derechos."* ["They had no rights."]

> *"Antes la mujer no trabajaba, no estudiaba. Ahora acá la mayoría trabaja, no estudia. El tiene que aprender, que se hagan de comer hasta para sus hijos."*
>
> ["Before women did not work and did not go to school. Now the majority around here work, though they still do not go to school. Men have to learn, they have to cook for themselves, and for their children too."]

Figure 53: *Olla de barro* [clay pot] for frijoles or coffee

The clay *comal* on which she is making tortillas as we speak costs about thirty-five pesos today, more than the last, which cost twenty-five. She says it lasts her anywhere from six months to two years, depending on when a child runs into it and breaks it. All the ladies compare notes on how much their comales cost and how long they lasted. Before, she says, instead of the aluminum *vaporera* that is used now to steam

tamales, they used clay pots—*"ollas de barro, no las cazuelas"* (Figure 53). There is a big difference between the ollas—used for making coffee or beans and the *cazuelas* used for cooking rice or *mole*, for instance.

Doña Livoria tells me that about ten families from the barrio help with meals for the Domingo de Ramos—*"dan asistencia. A los músicos se les da cena, a las promesas desayuno, almuerzo y comida."* ["Musicians are fed dinner; the *promises* are given breakfast, lunch and the mid-day meal."] She assures me that the fiestas keep getting better with time, with fine brand liquor served instead of the grain alcohol made from the sugar cane for which Morelos is famous. *"Las fiestas cada vez mejoran. Hasta en Santa Catarina (Tepoztlán) daban alcohol del 96 y ahora puro Presidente y Tecate."* ["The fiestas keep getting better. Even in Santa Catarina they used to serve grain alcohol and now they serve Presidente and *Tecate*."] *Itacate* she says, mispronouncing the beer, causing all the women to laugh: *"quiero mi Itacate para llevar!"* they all chime in. Of course the beer is *Tecate*, but *itacate* is the Nahuatl term regularly used here and in Xochimilco referring to food that is wrapped up to go, given to guests after fiestas to take home, or taken to men working in the fields. Even the menus have improved with the steady income that comes from salaries. *"Antes daban res y puerco* [in chile] *y ahora el pollo en mole. A veces daban mole verde, ahora rojo."* ["Before people gave meat in chile, whether pork or beef. Now they serve chicken in *mole*. Sometimes they used to serve green *mole*, but now it is red *mole*."]

I ask her about the *tortillerías*, if they use *nixtamal. "Sí, pero quién sabe de dónde lo traigan. Es transportado. El bueno es el criollo de por acá. Ese es el*

bueno. Huele. El de acá (de la tortillería) huele pero a olote, creo que le muelen con todo y olote." ["Yes, but who knows where it comes from. It is not good corn from around here, it is transported in. The good one is the local variety from around here, that is the good one. You can smell it. The one the *tortillería* here uses smell alright, but like cobs. I think they grind it with corn cobs and all."][54]

Sitting on the ground at Doña Livoria's feet listening to her talk as she makes tortillas, I am struck with her lack of nostalgia for the old days despite some criticisms of changes. In the process, it becomes clear that fiestas—while traditional—have grown over the years in Ocotepec with most people no longer depending on agriculture for a living. Fewer people offered food before because they could not count on having anything to offer! Stressing the insecurity of the old days, she says: *"Los señores trabajaban en el campo y a veces se daba la cosecha y a veces no. Solo la gente que criaba pollos daban comida."* ["The men worked in the fields and sometimes the harvest was plentiful and sometimes it wasn't. Only the people who raised chickens offered meals."]

Saturday April 7, 2001. The day before Palm Sunday at Doña Rosalinda's house

The streets of Ocotepec are filled with vendors selling all sorts of traditional clay cookware (Figure 54). Traffic on the road to Tepoztlán is at a near standstill. I am struck in particular by the huge *ollas* and *cazuelas de barro*, big enough to bathe in. Like Doña Rosalinda, most of the families in this barrio de los

[54] Almost all of my informants referred to the smell of corn at one time or another, and evaluated its quality on that basis.

Ramos or *Tlagoapan* are preparing food for friends and family. In addition, many are preparing food to receive the *promesas* and *compadres* from other towns or neighborhoods that join them every year for their *fiesta del barrio.*

Figure 54: *Cazuelas de barro* for sale on the street in Ocotepec

I arrive with my son Mario at noon and spend the first three hours cleaning five kilos of rice and observing other food preparation activities. Rosalinda' sister, Maria, is making *mole* at the same time. To my surprise, she does not hide the recipe! *Mole* in Ocotepec is different than the sweet *mole rojo* [red mole] I am used to from Xochimilco, but this is the first time I accompany the makings from the beginning. Maria is not as talkative as her sister, but she answers my questions. Not until later do I learn that she is mourning the death of her niece's baby, born with her umbilical chord wrapped around her neck. *"No le pusieron*

atención en el Seguro," says the grieving would-be grandmother. ["They did not pay attention to her at the Social Security clinic."]

This upsets me. Every home I visit in my three communities has one if not more deaths in the family that seem avoidable and unjust from my American perspective, deaths due to accidents, disease, violence, or just plain neglect. The family's passive acceptance of death is always striking to me. I know most women in Ocotepec, like my neighbors in Xochimilco who have been telling me horror stories for years, have no choice but to have their babies in a government clinic if they want medical attention. But the quality of the attention as well as the conditions of the hospitals are often appalling, with women piled up in the hallways, laying two to a bed, and bullied or neglected during labor. I am angry. My son Mario was born with his umbilical chord looped three times around his neck like a tie—*nació con corbata,* his father said. But I was in a private clinic in Mexico City, with a doctor who was paying attention, and who flipped the triple noose over his little head before it was too late. One of the more painful differences of which I am excruciatingly conscious, and that separates me from my informants like a dark canyon, is their lack of access to adequate medical attention. "Participant-observation is a farce," I think as I sit cleaning the rice beside Maria in Rosalinda' new outdoor kitchen, knowing that I choose to participate in some aspects of my informants' lives and not in others, giving me a skewed impression of their world.

Figure 55: Birds-eye view of the fiesta from the smoke kitchen on the roof

When we arrive, we find Rosalinda and Maria on top of the roof cooking. Before I know it, Mario and I are up there with them trying out the new kitchen with them. The *smoke kitchen,* as Rosalinda calls it, used to be in her house-lot garden below us, but with the space shrinking with new construction, she had it put on the flat roof where it now provides the cooks with a birds-eye view of the festivities below (Figure 55). This is highly unusual, but worked out well.

Rosalinda explains that when the men finished building her adobe house they offered to put a fence between her and her brother's house next door and to put a *cocina de humo* on top of the other structure on the other side of her house-lot garden where she rents the space to the *tortillería* and butcher shop. Now she not only has all she needs to continue to provide meals for fiestas but she can offer her guests a spectacular view of the chapel, and the small lot just across the street where many community festivities take place. Although Rosalinda had no more money at the time, the men agreed to finish the job on credit with the existing material.

The little kitchen is piled high with the usual cooking implements, huge *cazuela*s stacked upon each other. People come in several times during the morning to ask to borrow one. Rosalinda laughs when I point this out and says she has another room full of such things. There is also a pile of wood—both scrap lumber and dried tree branches. In the back I see a *manojo* or bunch of corn husks that I will be responsible for soaking and preparing for the tamales.

A large *olla* with a small mouth sits in the corner where we will later build one of two fires and set the *vaporera* with the tamales (Figure 53). I ask what it is for and get the non specific response: *"pa' lo que quiera, para café or frijol."* ["For whatever you want, for coffee or beans."] Of course it is not for anything, I chuckle to myself, not really *"pa' lo que quiera*,*"* as you would probably never make anything but beans or coffee in it, certainly never *mole* or rice! But it seems the boundaries of culture are invisible until transgressed, such as for instance if I tried to make coffee in the *cazuela* and *mole* in the *olla*. Or if I wanted to feed

meat on the first day of a wake in Xochimilco with a body present—*cuerpo presente*—or serve tamales *nejos* with red *mole* instead of green in Tetecala.

Rosalinda is about to light the charcoal on the little grill, the *anafre,* and put a huge kettle of pumpkin and *piloncillo* [brown sugar] to make *calabaza en dulce* on the fire. This, as well as the *elotes* [corn on the cob] cooking downstairs are being prepared to sell tomorrow at her food both on the street corner outside the *carnicería*. I can not think of a single woman with whom I am working in my three communities that does not have sales of some kind making up part of her multiple economic strategies, often the sale of some kind of food she prepares for that purpose.[55]

Maria is stirring a pan full of sesame seeds, toasting them over the gas grill. I begin to clean five kilos of rice, to observe, and to ask questions. Every now and then, I pull out my notebook and scribble a few things. The women always refer to the two different sets of ingredients which *mole* includes, the *olores* and the *chile.* Maria's recipe for this *mole* is as follows:

- 7 *puños de ajonjolí* (2 kilos) [7 fistfuls of sesame seed]
- 1 *kilo de cacahuates* [peanuts]
- 1/2 *de almendra* [almonds]
- 3/4 *de pepita limpia* [shelled pumpkin seed]
- 1/2 *de nuez* [nuts, pecans in this case]
- 1/2 *de ajo pelado* [peeled garlic]

[55] See Simonelli for an ethnography of women's household strategies in a community in Sonora, including food related resource-generating activities (1986: 157).

- 5 *bolillos duros* [hard rolls of bread][56]
- 7 *tortillas duras* [hard tortilla]

That is all for *los olores* (Figure 56). But besides there are the seven kilos of chile, about equal parts *chile mulato, pasilla,* and *ancho.* All this is fried separately in *manteca de puerco* [lard] beginning with the cacahuates down to the tortillas, being careful not to burn anything, as that would spoil the *mole* by making it bitter. Avoiding bitter *mole*, and the danger of it separating like butter when beaten too long, are challenges for the cook. *Hay que cuidar que no se vayan a quemar las cosas porque sale amargo el mole.* [You have to be careful not to burn anything or the *mole* is bitter.] As Maria's daughter will tell me tomorrow and I will hear in several other fiestas in Ocotepec, *mole* is also supposed to be stirred from start to finish by the same cook—even though this can easily take four hours, depending on the size of the *cazuela*.

Figure 56: *Los olores del mole*

In Tepoztlán, where Rosalinda and Maria have a sister, they make sweet red *mole*, the sisters they tell me. They use chocolate, *galletas Marías,* even *platano macho. "Sale dulce el mole."* ["It turns out sweet."] Having been eating *mole* for fifteen years, until today I thought red and black *mole* was practically

[56] Both the bread and tortilla in this recipe are dry, regular household left-overs.

defined by having chocolate regardless of regional variations. Wrong. Amazing what you learn when you pay attention to detail!

The traditional pumpkin or *calabaza* that Rosalinda is making to sell also has its secrets. To begin with, it is important that the pumpkin itself be hard and dry. Rosalinda has a huge *calabaza* that she had since January and was planning to prepare in sugar to sell in the market; it is perfect now. I am surprised to hear she when she does sell food she goes not to the central market in downtown Cuernavaca, nor to the local market in Ocotepec, but to the *mercado Carolina*, the same place where the women went to buy the *pancita* for the dinner last Friday. I wonder if other women in Ocotepec have a special relationship with that particular market, and if anyone ever shops at the local market? Every time I go by the local market it is empty.

Maria looks younger than her fifty years. She looks like Rosalinda except the long hair and apron makes her seem more the part of a traditional cook. She has six children, ranging from ages eight to thirty-four, four boys and two girls. And she has a husband, unlike Rosalinda and her neighbor, Laura, who is with us, though the latter have children also. Two of her daughters are with us most of the day helping out: the youngest, eight, and one in her twenties who is pregnant. Maria is very proud that her daughter is an accountant. In response to my question, she says that daughter still cooks, even if she does not spend as much time as she does preparing food.

"Yo me paso todo el día cocinando!" ["I spend the whole day cooking!"] says Maria. Yesterday, for example, she made vegetable salad with carrots and

peas, and baked chicken covered in chile, an everyday dish. She says they mostly eat meat with chile—*carne de puerco, de pollo, o de res*—pork, chicken, or beef. She readily shares the recipe for yesterday's meal: *"Si son dos pollos, como 1/2 kilo de chile, como 1/4 o más de chile guajillo y unos chilitos de arbol."* ["If you have two chickens, take about 1/2 a kilo of chile, about 1/4 or more of guajillo chili and a few chiles de arbol."] And garlic and onion. Unlike Susana's family in Tetecala, they do not use vinegar regularly here. As in all the recipes women give me, quantities are never precise but based on intuition or feel. *"No más le tantea uno"* is the usual response when I ask how much or how many. Again the details are key: do not rub the chicken with chili until it has started to brown and release the juices, she warns me.

Maria's house-lot garden, down the street, has three food bearing trees—tangerine, peach, and avocado—though she has still not acquired the ornamental plants as she would like. She says all her children live on the same *terreno* or plot of land, though some are separate, or *aparte.* Separateness is usually defined by whether or not they eat from the same kitchen.

Maria loves her sister's new house. In fact she spent the night here last night after cooking and drinking late. This becomes clear as her adult children filter in and tease her about this. Her husband was apparently not amused.

Maria confirms what several people have told me, that people in Ocotepec go to the hills behind town—*el cerro*—during the rainy season to gather mushrooms. She names several that they bring home: *"clavitos, enrramada, trompitas" (*these are available in yellow and blue), and *"escobetas."* She does

not gather mushrooms herself. I ask if she buys them from the people that do but it seems that they gather them mostly for their household, and share them with friends if they have extra.

As for where she buys clay pots and dishes, *"las ollas y vajillas las traemos de Metepec, o también se compran en Ozumba."* ["The pots and dishes come from Metepec, or Ozumba."] Depending where you are going. Which depends on when different towns celebrate their fiestas. Of course it also depends on the reputation each town has for its clay cookware.

"Ya están los olores" ["The olores are ready"], Maria announces to her sister mid-morning. One of the two components of the *mole* is complete. *"El chile todavía lo voy a remojar."* ["I still have to soak the chile."] I help her rinse out the chilies, flooding a large baby-pool sized tub with water several times. They have already been de-stemmed and de-veined so as not to be too spicy, but the remaining seeds now float away with lots of dirt. The inconvenience of having a kitchen on the roof becomes clear to me as I spend the day climbing up and down the stairs to use the water in the yard below.

Throughout the day I am drinking water from one of the huge water bottles labeled *Agua de los Angeles*. I assume it is the same water I pay to have delivered to my house once a week for drinking and cooking. Not until the next day when I am asked to make the tamarind water with water from the faucet in the yard do I realize that the plastic jugs are only used to store regular tap water. Shit. In a short while my stomach hurts and I feel nauseous, a feeling that will not leave

me for a couple of days. Another difference between me and my informants is my intolerance for the water most people consume. From here on out I stick to beer.

After I complete several cooking tasks, Mario is tired of spinning his top and reading his book. It is unheard of that we should leave without eating, and we are offered *posole* for lunch. *"Sírveles Laura!"* ["Serve them Laura!"] Rosalinda yells to her friend across the yard. And we are served big bowls of posole with corn and pork meat, garnished with chopped onion, toasted ground chile, and lemon. And tacos full of chopped fried potatoes. Everything is delicious; Mario cheers up.

We are fed inside the house, at the dining room table covered with its permanent see-through plastic cover much like Señora Rosa's. Rosalinda's elderly mother is sitting on the sofa. *"Quién es?"* ["Who is it?"] she wants to know. *"Vino a ayudar,"* ["She came to help,] Rosalinda's cousin responds. That is apparently all the explanation needed, as food preparation helpers are not uncommon in this kitchen on days leading up to Palm Sunday! *"Qué triste,"* ["How sad,] says the cousin, as she helps the *abuelita* up from the sofa to take her to the bathroom. *"Más triste los viejitos que estan solós,"* I respond. ["It is sadder yet when old people are alone."] I think how uncommon it is in the U.S. for dependent elderly to be in the home with younger generations. The next day, a man as old as this woman—her *compadre*—drops in, a very skinny man who looks to be at least 80. He is visiting Ocotepec from another *pueblo* for the *fiesta del barrio*. The younger women are happy that the *abuelita* has company. Though

they are both nearly deaf, they sit side by side on her bed and chat away happily, keeping each other company.

I leave around 3:30, just in time to get Mario to his Boy Scouts. I return that evening to find Rosalinda and her group of women hard at work in the chapel hanging up the final decorations, some of paper and straws, some of real flowers. The sweet smell of flowers fills the tiny chapel and overflows into the open space where the few pews are lined up and the musicians play non-stop. Purple and white are the dominant colors (Figure 57). The women are beaming, pleased with their work.

Figure 57: Paper flowers with plastic straws decorate the chapel in Los Ramos on Palm Sunday

Everyone who is working to prepare for the fiesta in this community is invited to dinner at another neighbor's yard, and I am welcomed to come along. *Tacos al pastor* are served, the very same sold on street corners everywhere in Mexico. The tacos are served with grilled onions, cilantro, and salsa. Soft drinks and alcohol are offered.

As I walk back to my car later, I meet two little girls ages ten and eleven. They are playing in the empty lot where two poles have been set up next to the wrestling ring and are greased for people to climb in the contest tomorrow. Gifts including kitchen plates and alcohol will be at the top of the pole for those who manage to get there. The girls are very excited about the festivities. *"Los luchadores se cambian en mi casa!"* says one, thrilled. ["The wrestlers change clothes at my house!"] She lives just up the street, and caught sight of Mario earlier today. *"Dónde está?"* ["Where is he?"] she asks. *"Está guapo?"* ["Is he cute?"] asks the other. *"Sí!"* ["Yes!"] squeals the first in response. When it comes to boys, preteen girls may be just about the same everywhere!

April 8, 2001. Palm Sunday in the barrio de los Ramos

I arrive just after 6 a.m. Already, the people from nearby Cuentepec—an indigenous Nahuatl-speaking town nearby—are weaving their palm crosses and leaves in front of the chapel. Musicians are playing on the patio of the chapel, and fireworks are being launched into the sky. I help Rosalinda and her sister carry a table from the church so that we can make the tamales. Rosalinda stops to barter with the palm weavers—*los tejedores de palma.* One woman wants ten pesos for

her woven leaf. Rosalinda goes to the next one, who wants five pesos, and offers her ten pesos for three. She accepts. Rosalinda chooses her three; I will return for them later after we get the table and set it up in the smoke kitchen. A *compadre* will make a cross out of the three and attach a flower to the middle. This will serve to decorate the outdoor seating area that has been arranged on the roof beside Rosalinda's fiesta kitchen.

Rosalinda' sons, ages fifteen and eighteen, are setting up food booths on the sidewalk outside of the *carnicería* and the *tortillería.* They have been chilling cans and bottles of beer in buckets of ice all night. The boys will sell beer, corn on the cob, and sweet squash—*calabaza en dulce.* The *calabaza* cooked slowly over the fire most of yesterday. Today it is still warm and smells delicious, its pulp a dark brown. Rosalinda gives me a sliver to taste. I steal pumpkin seeds from the *cazuela* until she takes it away for the boys to sell.

"Señora, ya está su masa!" ["Ma'am, your corn dough is ready!"] cries the woman from the *tortillería* to Rosalinda. The beans and *habas* (fava beans, very traditional in this region) have been taken to the *molino* and are nicely ground. We are ready to make tamales.

Laura joins us to help, as does Maria del Carmen and a comadre from Santa Maria. With Maria and her older daughter, not counting myself, there are six women working together most of the day preparing food for the fiesta in the little smoke kitchen on the rooftop. This does not include the cousin, Doña Adelita, who is cooking other foods in the house, and the two young girls (Maria's daughters-in-law) who help make the *agua de sandía and agua de*

tamarindo—watermelon and tamarind water—in the house-lot garden on ground level below.

"Ya escojiste el frijol?" asks Rosalinda, ["Did you clean the beans?"] *"Ya,"* ["Done,"] someone responds. The stones have been picked out of the beans. Maria puts them on the gas grill. Several times in the day we have to heat more water to add to the beans so they do not dry out—apparently it is not OK to add cold water directly.

The women work, all morning long, taking many breaks to look out the window at the goings on in the church, and commenting on the splendor of a particular *promesa* as they arrive, each announced by church bells and fireworks. Such and such a barrio has brought beautiful flowers, or so many fireworks, they comment. The church P.A. system has been squealing since 6 a.m., announcing the festivities of the day, inviting one and all to come partake of the events in the barrio de los Ramos on this Palm Sunday.

"Ya está la calabaza," the pumpkin is ready, says one woman after tasting it, and it is sent downstairs to sell.

"Carnicero, la manteca!" somebody else yells. ["Butcher, the lard!"] We are waiting on that to finish preparing the *masa* for the tamales. We have 5 kilos of *masa* or corn dough in all, at least five of manteca, and two batches of ground frijoles and habas.

Figure 58: Pairs of hands with *masa* for tamales

The work requires several pairs of hands working together over several hours (Figure 58). The *masa* is spread out, hands smoothing it and patting it into a big rectangle on the borrowed church table. Where it is too thick, a hand swoops in to pinch the excess and add it to the edge of the rectangle. A layer of bean, or alternately, *haba* is spread out on top, about the same thickness. Both the *masa* and the bean and haba have been well mixed with manteca and salt. Then somebody draws their pointer finger across the *masa,* subdividing it into a smaller square. That is then rolled up, and then pinched into small 1-2" swirls of *masa* (Figure 59).

By now I have completed my first task, one that required me to run upstairs to check on more detailed instructions a couple of times. I was asked to soak the dried cornhusks—*remojar los manojos de hoja*—, but even this relatively simple task requires expertise that I lack. I am afraid to break them; it is not easy to separate the dozens of husks that have been neatly tucked one inside the other and dried in a tight bundle. They must first be soaked, then gently pulled apart. I can imagine the disaster if I break the leaves while soaking them! How would we make the tamales then? I am pretty good before the day is over. *"Ya puedes sacar*

tu diploma en remojando hojas!" ["Now you can get your diploma in soaking cornhusks,"] Laura jokes.

Making bean tamales is a long process. The pattern described above continues for at least three hours: spread the *masa* as thinly and evenly as possible, spread beans or habas on it, *cut* the *masa* using a finger, roll it into a little log, cut it with hands into small tamal-sized chunks. A final trick is the last step in making the two-tone tamales de frijol, whereby the corn husk is twisted and pushed into the body of the tamal. Bean tamales are the only ones with *ombligo* or belly button, according to Dr. Sergio Cordero Espinosa, an amateur historian in Xochimilco, because corn and beans are the key elements linking humans to life (personal interview 11/26/00). According to a book dedicated to tamales published by the Museum of Popular Cultures as part of their series on food in the year 2000, *tamal* or *tamalli* signifies *"envuelto cuidadoso"* or "carefully wrapped" (Pérez San Vicente 2000: 21). The book mentions the 370 different types of tamales made in Mexico, including in these the various meat-based *mixiotes* so often cooked in Xochimilco that were originally wrapped in the skin of the century plant and then steamed.

And I am struck with the very careful patting and almost caressing of the tamal at each of its stages, nothing like I've ever seen in the preparation of green or sweet tamales. Finally, as we are several hours into this and only halfway through, I take courage and start rolling them too. The trick to the belly button is to put the little pat of *masa* half-way up the husk, at least 1 1/2 inches from the

bottom. The *masa* is pushed down when you tuck the tail inside the center of it, making its belly button (Figure 59).

Figure 59: Bean tamales with "belly button"

Talk among the women involved in this ritual today inevitably turns to the stories of tamales that did not cook right, and why. Always due to some kind of discord: people arguing, fighting, in a bad mood. Cases supporting this are discussed with specifics. *"Es que se pelearon!"* ["It is because they had a fight!"] They scorn such foolishness. *"Faltaba que la cocinera tomara vino,"* says one woman, ["What was missing was for the cook to drink wine."] *"No, sí tomó,"* says another, ["No, she did drink wine."] *"Faltó que bailara"* ["She needed to dance,"] is the response. Here, in Ocotepec, the final solution to raw tamales is for the cook to drink alcohol and dance around the pot.

I ask if men ever make tamales, and the joking that is a key ingredient in this collective cooking process begins again. *"Compadre,"* they joke, pretending to be men, *"vamos a hacer tamales."* ["*Compadre*, lets make tamales."] Apparently, the answer to my question is "no." But this leads to stories of exceptions, men who cook "women's" food. One woman has an uncle who makes

mole—"no más que es del dulce"—["but it is the sweet kind"], which he sells on the street to tourists, most of them from Mexico City. People increasingly come to Ocotepec from Mexico City or Cuernavaca to eat traditional food in the makeshift restaurants on the side of the main road. The talk turns to how expensive he is: last year he sold his *mole* at eighty pesos per plate at the *"carretera"* [the highway][57], with lots of turkey of course and delicious, everyone agrees, but eighty peso! The women are scandalized. They can not believe anyone would pay such a price, no matter how good the *mole*.

Before the first tamal is laid in the tamale pot or vaporera, Maria holds it in her hand and makes the sign of the cross over the mouth of the pot. No need for coins in the bottom or nails in a cross, as in Xochimilco, or the chilies in a cross with salt over them on the fire, as in Tetecala. When I ask, she answers: *"Ya lo santigué."* ["I already made the sign of the cross over it."] Maria is the designated tamal layer, and when she is gone, the tamales pile up. Yet the women refuse my offer to set them into the pot. The person who begins must continue, like with the *mole.* Tamales are so "delicate," everyone says. Eventually, Maria's daughter does take over as her mother is taking too long, but she is the only one who can fill in for her mother.

Men come and go as we do this, helping out where they can in different but related tasks. One of Rosalinda's *compadres* is building the tables and setting the chairs up on the new dining hall on the roof. Another comes to check the gas tank and asks if we plan to use it all day. *"No va a alcanzar este tanque"* ["This

[57] In reference to the road that cuts through the town.

tank will not be enough"], he says. Everything is closed today, but he goes to find a replacement at somebody's house. Other young men are sent by their wives to borrow *cazuelas de barro* and other large party cookware from Rosalinda. The new smoke kitchen on the roof is a hub of community activity.

Nobody here except for Maria's pregnant daughter have ever eaten *tamales de haba*, much less made them. But the daughter tried them on her reciprocal *promesa* to San Francisco, in Estado de Mexico, one of the towns with which this barrio has a reciprocal relationship that is maintained in part through the annual fiesta on Palm Sunday. And since she is *"de antojo"* [pregnant, "with cravings"], her aunt Rosalinda decided to surprise her with the special tamales.

"A mi me gustan mucho los frijoles negros con zompantle y epazote" ["I love black beans with *zompantle* flower and *epazote*"], says someone dreamily, inspired by the smell of the beans –*frijoles chinos*—cooking on the grill.[58] Several women in this region have told me the same thing: black beans made with the red flower of the *colorín* tree is a Morelos favorite.

Given the history of local conflicts over land and water, it does not surprise me to hear conversation turn to criticizing the neighboring community of Ahuatepec. *"Son agarrados,"* says Rosalinda, ["They do not like to spend money."] My informant from Ahuatepec, Doña Magdalena, says folks from Ocotepec are nasty, even dangerous. The history of boundary conflicts between them goes back for centuries, since Ahuatepec was founded on a piece of land that used to belong to Ocotepec. But this community festivity brings the

[58] Epazote (*Chenopodium ambrosioid L. Quenopodiáceas*) is a common herb for use in black beans in this region, and zompantle is eaten in both Ocotepec and Tetecala when the trees are in bloom. See Torres Cerdán (2000) regarding commonly used flowers in Mexican cooking.

neighboring *pueblos* together. That night the announcer at the wrestling match welcomes people from all around, addressing neighbors from this northern region of Cuernavaca: *"vecinos de esta zona norte de Cuernavaca, Ahuatepec, Chamilpa, Santa Maria."* My observations in this household and others confirm what several researchers told me, that this town has better relationships with the more agricultural towns in Tepoztlán, a couple of villages down the road, than with its immediate neighbor, Ahuatepec. People from the Tepoztlán community of Santa Catarina, for instance, now rent lands from Ocotepec for agricultural production, since the folks here make a better living from selling food and other things on the *carretera* (interview with Miguel Morayta, March 12, 2001).

Maria's pregnant daughter watches her mother fry the pork meat that she and Laura cut into chunks in the house-lot garden below, just outside the carnicería. After it is fried, it is removed from the pan and more lard is heated to fry the *mole.* She recalls the last time she made *mole* herself for a fiesta, about ten years ago, under her grandmother's tutelage. She still remembers her sore back:

> *"Hace como diez años, le dije a mi abuelita: 'Voy a hacer mole!' Y me puse a hacer mole. Pero luego duele bien feo la cintura! Y mi abuelita que me dice: 'No que querías hacer mole? Pues ahora a acabar!' Es que hay la creencia que tiene que ser la misma persona, si no se corta."*
>
> ["About ten years ago, I told my grandmother: 'I am going to make *mole*!' And I started to make *mole*. But later your back really hurts terribly! And my grandmother, she says: 'Did you not say you wanted to make *mole*? Now you will finish what you started!' You see, there is a belief that the same person must finish, otherwise it curdles and spoils."]

Her grandmother insisted she finish what she started. She addresses her story to all the women cooking, though the clarification at the end is for my benefit, not knowing I have heard this several times already, that the woman who

starts making the *mole* must finish the process. *"Y se mueve como tres horas o cuatro"* ["You have to stir it about three or four hours"], she groans. I can see that younger women not only do not devote the same amount of time their grandmothers did to cooking, but they also do not have the same tolerance for the energy required to pull it off.

I understand this from my own experience today, being in charge of making the *agua de tamarindo* [tamarind water], a chore I welcomed when the smoke in the little rooftop kitchen became absolutely intolerable to my throat and eyes. I found the job unbearably tedious. Unlike in my work in other fiestas and earlier in this one, I was not surrounded by other women whose company and conversation made it more fun! I realized I was not following tradition when I sought to innovate improved "technology" to separate the tamarind seeds and twigs from the pulp. But I could not see peeling each piece of tamarind one by one as I had been shown. I still used just my hands and a strainer and a spoon, but employed my hands as an improvised blender in one pot with very little water. I finished in one hour what could have taken three, knowing this was another characteristic that separates me from many of my informants, my lack of patience!

As the morning goes on, the delicious smell of the *carnitas* cooking on the street corner below wafts up to us. It is a man, as always in the case of *carnitas.* In our own small kitchen, the tamales are steaming, the *mole* and the rice are frying. All food from women's domain. Finally we are fed, after the male relatives downstairs, of course. A woman brings us some blood sausage and beans with

tortilla: *"un poco de morongita y frijolitos aunque sea."* ["A little bit of blood sausage and beans at least."] The women are surprised that I eat it. *"¿Cóme moronga?"* ["You eat blood sausage?"] I tell them my story of coming to Mexico as a vegetarian and lasting very little at the hands of a father-in-law from Michoacán, the land of *carnitas.* Every Sunday, it was a must, with *buche* fast becoming my favorite part of the pig. Certainly living in Xochimilco all those years and participating in non-stop fiestas also prepared me for eating all sorts of things, including animal parts and vegetables I had never even heard of!

I take a break after the food is all prepared and cooking in pots, leaving when I finish my seemingly impossible task with the tamarind water. I am exhausted and go home to take a nap before returning to eat in the evening. Rosalinda is very concerned that I return later to eat with my sons.

I am the only one who had the luxury of a nap. Yet when I return to enjoy the fiesta that evening, I am still tired long before the wrestlers finish insulting the public and hurling each other around the ring. Embodiment, I think, as the two sets of women wrestlers pull each other by the hair and smack each other on the behind, chuckling to myself as I recall my feminist literature review. Nobody seems particularly excited about the contrast with traditional gender roles, though everyone is excited about the wrestlers and their extraordinary costumes and masks, pushing to get closer to the ring. Very much a part of Mexican urban popular culture, wrestling is a favorite spectator sport, made even more popular by the hero of low-income housing rights in Mexico City—"Superbarrio"—who always appears with his wrestling get up at popular protests and political rallies.

Finally, the mats clear and several dozen little boys, Mario among them, have a turn hurling each other around and bouncing on the elastic chords that surround the ring. At 8 p.m., I am glad Mario remembers we have a date to go see a movie, and I get away before the festivities culminate in a spectacular *castillo* or fireworks display sometime before midnight.

April 9, 2001. Last day of the fiesta, concluding with a *jaripeo* or bull riding rodeo, preceded by the meal called *la marrana* for the bull owners and riders

Today is the closing day of the barrio fiesta, and I want to find the family hosting *la marrana*[59] or the meal for the bull fiesta today. The committee in charge of the bulls and everything associated with that is totally independent from the *comité femenil* [women's committee] with which I have been working, though all aspects of the festivities are coordinated by the representatives of the barrio de los Ramos at the church. And, everything related to the bulls, as with the committee in charge of the *castillo* or fireworks, is in the hands of the men. Women have little to do with it, except cooking.

I follow the directions Rosalinda gave me yesterday to her *compadre*'s house. She said he would know for sure who is hosting *la marrana*. Nobody is home, but I track Don Mario down at the church, where the men have been drinking for several days and nights now. The brass band continues to blast away, so I can not hear a word I say. I barely make out his response, and walk down the street a bit in the direction he is pointing, towards the pink house behind the orange tarp of a food booth.

[59] Literally, *marrana* means "sow."

Figure 60: *Nopales* cooking in *cazuela*

The women cooking in the house-lot garden point the host out to me right away. I introduce myself to them first and say I am studying food traditions and would like to speak with somebody about that. Apparently, they have no authority to speak. As in Xochimilco and yesterday in Doña Rosalinda's house, when you are part of the cooking crew, you attend to the visitors by serving them food, but if anybody has questions, there is only one speaker with authority to represent the group to an outsider. Only after chatting with the host for a few minutes—with the four or five women cooking in his patio listening intently—did I ask him if I could speak to the woman in charge. It was a tentative space and conversation that lasted for no more than fifteen minutes. The most daring thing I ask is if I can photograph the clay pot full of *nopales* on the firewood, arguing that I have plenty of pictures of rice but none yet of *nopales*, even though they are such a part of traditional food in this region and are regularly part of the menu at home and in fiestas (Figure 60).

Before introducing me to the hostess, his wife, the host explains that his group has about twenty-one active members who front the costs of the whole bull

festival, although there are additional members. Things have changed, he said, but the group continues its tradition as well as it can, *"como se puede."* He himself has only been a member for seven years, and has never hosted the meal before today. Later, his wife tells me that she has been in charge of other meals for this particular fiesta on Easter in the past, though never Ocotepec's fiesta on August 6.

A few of the changes in the celebration that the host mentions catch my attention. They no longer use horses for the *jaripeo* or rodeo, as it was costing too much money to pay their owners when bulls injured them. They no longer serve *agua loca* [crazy water] before the bulls, the grain alcohol drink which one food expert[60] at the Morelos Institute of Culture mentioned when he recommended that I explore the uniquely macho food rituals in *la marrana* that aim to get the guys who were going to ride the bulls ready for the day. Lots of chili and alcohol to give courage, *para dar valor*, he had told me. In Tetecala, they still drink "crazy water" but the bulls are not always real (see next chapter), and the biggest danger seems to be the drinking itself. This host in Ocotepec tells me they stopped making *agua loca* a few years ago because the guys were getting too drunk to ride the bulls and it was dangerous. *"Se imagina?"* ["Can you imagine?"] he asks me. They used to make up to ten big barrels of *agua loca,* with fruit water like *aguas frescas* but consisting primarily of pure cane alcohol. *"Ya no, ya damos puras cervezas."* ["Not anymore, nowadays we stick to beer."]

As I chat with the host, I watch the women cooking in large pots on three stones over firewood. I wonder if this simple version of the *tlicuil* that I find

[60] Biólogo Hernández, author of an ethnography of Nahuatl recipes in Morelos (1999).

everywhere sticks around because it is so practical and nothing that improves on it has replaced it.

Today's menu, prepared for one hundred and fifty people, is as follows: the usual "Mexican" rice (five kilos), *arroz a la mexicana* with fresh-ground tomato, fresh carrots and peas; a medium sized *cazuela de barro* of *nopales a la vinagreta* with lots of chilies and carrots and onions and the usual *hierbas de olor* or Spanish style Mediterranean spices (bay leaf, thyme, marjoram, etc. that you can buy all tied together in a little bunch at the market); chicken *a la barbacoa* (in a *vaporera* like that used for tamales*)* and *frijoles, "ni muy secos ni muy caldosos"* ["not too dry, not too soupy"].

I ask the obvious for conversation's sake, and because as usual it is not mentioned: "Are you are accompanying the meal with *tortilla?"* "*Sí, aquí toda comida se acompaña de tortilla"* ["Yes, here everything is accompanied by tortilla"], comes the inevitable response. *"De dónde las traen?"* ["Where do you get them from?"] *"De la tortillería"* ["From the *tortillería*"]. As I expected, this prompts a discussion among the women there. They explain that things have changed and they no longer make tortillas by hand, especially not for a large group like this. This leads to a brief discussion about blenders and *metates*—since they pointed out that they no longer spend all the work and time on grinding: *"ya no se usa,"* meaning it is no longer the custom. If you can use a blender, so much the better. I ask if anyone knows a women who still grinds corn on her *metate*, explaining that I am finding *metates* in every house but that they are usually used as a place to knead the corn dough, to *amasar la masa* for the tortillas. Even the

oldest woman here today, about 65 or so, does not know anyone who grinds corn by hand anymore. It seems that despite the changes in source and method of preparation of traditional foods, the importance of consuming them socially at traditional food rites has not diminished in the least. Perhaps it has even increased with so many changes in everyday life.

Before leaving el barrio de los Ramos, I stop by Doña Rosalinda's to say hello. Rosalinda and her sister Maria are busy sweeping and collecting the leftover Styrofoam dishes, plastic cups, chicken bones, and even cold ash from yesterday's party and putting them in big plastic bags. I help finish the job, coughing at the fine ash in the air and remembering how bad the smoke was yesterday on the women's throat and eyes. Very hard on the lungs and eyes, especially on long days like that, where some women spend nearly ten hours in the smoke! I know I was surprised when I came back in the afternoon yesterday to find the same women cooking in the same smoke, but wearing new party outfits.

Though brief, it is an important stop, given that I have come to thank them and not to request anything. I thank them for their generous sharing, and for offering me the best seat in town–what with the new kitchen and dining room on the roof overlooking the church courtyard and the wresting ring—something of which Rosalinda is very proud.

Best of all, I have a chance to chat with Maria, who seems only now to understand that I was involved in the kitchen activity and discussions for school reasons. This is very important to her. *"Es su trabajo?"* She is amazed. I assure her that I enjoy it, that when I lived in Xochimilco I did the same thing just as part

of living in the barrio, but that now I am focusing intently on kitchens and food preparation because I am working on a *tesis*.

Maria, suddenly concerned that I do a good job, advises me that in the future I should tell people that this is for my studies [“*para mi carrera”*]. She warns me to be wary of people who might be telling me lies. She reflects on the questions I asked her two days ago as I was cleaning rice while she made *mole*. Somewhat apologetically, she says it was tiring to talk so much, *“es cansado.”* Before I leave, Rosalinda insists on my taking more food home, *frijoles en mole,* which they are reheating for the main meal today. Perfect accompaniment to the *tamales de frijol* she sent home with me yesterday!

1 de Mayo 2001. Barrio de Santa Cruz, Ocotepec

I took my dog to see our old vet, precisely because he is from Ocotepec. León has been a friend of the family’s for over six years and not only knows our current lab, Tequila, but he knew our previous dog, Zenda. He knows my kids well also, and had offered them one of his pups as a gift a couple of years ago after Zenda died.

León was very friendly and helpful today. I explain my research and ask him if he would introduce me to his mother or sisters. He offers to take me down the street right away to meet his cousin, Maria Teresa. She is in charge of the meal for the barrio at the annual *fiesta del barrio,* or *fiesta de la Santa Cruz* this Thursday. *“Va a dar la asistencia*” [“She will be giving service”] he says; she will be giving the meal for all the barrio*s* on that day. Later I find out from her

that it was her father's commitment, not hers. The old man had committed to giving the *asistencia* at last year's planning meeting following the fiesta. *"El apellido hay que lavarlo muy bien"* ["The family name must be scrubbed very well"], Maria Teresa joked with me later. Younger family members not only listen to and obey their elders, but do everything to protect their honor, which is theirs as well!

After vetting Tequila, we walk down the street and meet his cousin. He introduces me as an old friend—*"una vieja amiga"*—, which makes all the difference in the world. Rather than the formal treatment I was given by the women at Doña Rosalinda's, Maria Teresa's family immediately addresses me in informal register—so unusual in central Mexico! I feel like part of the family. Being part of the family will also mean I do not have to deal with men making passes at me, and the ensuing tension that causes among my female informants, thank God.

The next day when I arrive, Maria Teresa is busy receiving several guests in the chairs set up in her house-lot garden just outside of her house. She is offering them drinks and formally inviting them to the meal the next day; I am sent directly to the kitchen to chop carrots. Before the collective work party would be over in a couple of days and after the meal for eight hundred people, I would end up scrubbing gigantic kitchen pots in the yard! Today, Maria Teresa and I briefly discuss my research and interest in participating with the work tomorrow and Thursday. Given the circumstances–*"de confianza"*—of the introduction, I

tell her that I am interested in following up the fiesta with interviews of women about their everyday cooking. That, it turns out, would be much more difficult.

Maria Teresa is glad for my help, especially since she will not have the support of León's mother and sisters. They will be preparing a *comida* in their own house, as they have construction going on and the *día de la Santa Cruz* is also de *día del albañil* [the day of the construction worker]. León jokes that I am his representative, since with his regular job at a government agency he will not be able to help that day either. Even today, *día del trabajador* [worker's day], which is an official holiday, he takes the opportunity provided by his *day off* to do house calls to ailing animals. Like everyone else in Mexico's precarious economy, male or female, León keeps multiple economic strategies going to support his family. I tell him that although he may not be able to help with the meal for the barrios with his time and labor, I am sure he already contributed: his cousin says of course he has–not only by paying into the neighborhood collection but in addition to that.

Figure 61: Corn for *nixtamal* in Ocotepec

Maria Teresa's house is typical in a sense: it is under construction like her cousin's, the vet, and about one out of every five homes in Ocotepec. We arrive at the small house by walking through a large plot of land that includes a *milpa* [cornfield] covered with corn drying on the stalk (Figure 61). I mention to León that growing corn seems to be much more important symbolically than it is economically. He agrees and says that the old man who planted this–Maria Teresa's father—does it *"por gusto,"* for pleasure. *"Si sacaras las cuentas"* ["If you did the math"], he assures me, and figured the costs of production, it makes no sense whatsoever to grow your own corn today. People do anyway because it is meaningful and important to them. I ask if any young people grow corn now. No, he says, they prefer to buy it at the market where it is much cheaper and less work. I wonder if corn traditions will die out in this community with the older generation, and with the loss of land to more construction.

The next day, May 2, last day before the fiesta

Due to a previous commitment I made before meeting Maria Teresa yesterday, I have only one hour free this morning and one more late this afternoon to join the women helping with food preparations for the fiesta. Funny how it does not really matter. I notice with my research, as I did with my diplomatic work with Mexican border states, that relationships in particular are built over time; how long somebody has known you seems to matter more than the intensity or amount of time shared together. Maybe with the characteristically Mexican fear of betrayal, only time tells whether a person will take something from you or damage you or your honor in some way. That is why León's generous introduction here is so important. I am particularly grateful as his relationship is primarily with my ex-husband and children rather than me. But it is also characteristic of relationships in Mexico that they are based more on networks and family than on individuals. Just as León's introduction opens the doors to his extended family, so does my relationship with Pancho and León's ongoing relationship with my ex bring me into his confidence. And since León himself has become divorced from his wife and separated from his daughters since I last saw him five years ago, my divorce and move to Texas does not particularly surprise or trouble his family. I see this is a sign of modernity transforming Ocotepec, remembering in contrast Xochimilco's relative conservatism, and the 30-year old woman with whom I recently spoke whose mother absolutely forbade her to divorce her husband despite serious incompatibility!

Maria Teresa's family has been preparing to host tomorrow's meal for the past year. Over the last six months in particular, the family has been stocking up on all the non-perishables that will be needed, and making decorations by hand. These include the *banderitas de papel picado* –the traditional paper banners with designs cut into them—that are the domain of the abuelo, the family patriarch. He is the expert and cuts out all the designs with scissors. Lucía, Maria Teresa's 22-year old daughter who is helping with everything, tells me he has taught others in the family how to do it, but none have obtained his level of skill. Rosalinda will comment later that this family is well known in town for their skill with handmade decorations. At one point, I overhear Maria Teresa telling one of the women who is helping out in the house-lot garden that she will gladly advise her and help out with an upcoming wedding. She assures the woman that she has plenty of experience making floral arrangements and decorations.

When I return in the afternoon, I help two neighbor women glue paper banners onto dozens of long strings that have been set up to zigzag across the house-lot garden like a clothesline. The banners will be strung up above the street and along the pathway to the house early tomorrow morning. The little *banderitas*—red, orange, pink, white, blue and green—will mark the entrance to the yard, leading everyone directly down the field to the altar with the *santa cruz* or wooden holy cross that is at the center of this celebration, also adorned with brightly colored paper. As I work with three other women gluing the banners onto the strings, I comment how lucky we are that it is not raining, given that the last two weeks have brought unusual rainstorms every afternoon, evening and

sometimes throughout the night. One woman interrupts her task with the glue to look up at the sky with her arms outstretched and exclaims: *"Gracias, Dios es muy grande!"* ["Thank you, God is great!"]

Besides the paper banners, Maria Teresa has been preparing the baskets for the tortillas and the napkins that will be used to cover them, as well as saltshakers and napkin holders. They look exactly like what you might find in a fiesta in Xochimilco, except that the family name is not printed or embroidered on anything. She only sits at the kitchen table with us for moments at a time, trying to finish the decorations, using her electric glue gun to stick the dried white flowers and the blue ribbon onto the remaining napkin holders. She is constantly interrupted; her obligations as hostess require her to leave the kitchen several times to go to the door and greet and welcome someone else to tomorrow's meal. During the hour or so that I am working in her kitchen this morning, she only spends about ten minutes on her task. Typical of women's work—full of interruptions. No wonder pulling off a reception like this requires women to organize among themselves to cover all the tasks despite every one having other things to do and often other people to care and cook for!

Like every other collective food preparation for a community festivity that I have attended, not only does the host coordinate the preparation of the main meal, but she also makes sure her helpers are fed, and that when they leave, they take food home with them. Maria Teresa says that today she will serve *chicharrón en chile verde* [pork rind in green salsa], and beans, a typical and relatively low-budget meal. Later she tells me that in nearby Ahuatepec you have to pay people

to help you cook, whereas here it is still the custom for people to help out and the host to send them home with something—*"le manda uno su taquito."* In Xochimilco you would call that your *itacate,* but the practice is the same.

As I sit at the kitchen table chopping carrots for the rice, *arroz a la mexicana* of course, I take the opportunity to interview Antoña, the young woman who is peeling and cutting the ends off the carrots. I am interested in her perspective on changes in the kitchen that the older women I have been speaking to generally blame on young women. She is quiet until I strike up a conversation, but is friendly and willing to talk when I do. First we talk about carrots of course, organizing how to best get through the twenty kilo bag on the floor next to the table. She peels, I chop. Antoña is helping out today because Maria Teresa went across the street to her house and asked her to support the food preparation efforts for this big commitment—*este gran compromiso*. I begin by telling her that I am studying food customs in Ocotepec; she tells me right away that she is not from Ocotepec. When I find out she has lived here for twenty of her twenty-five years, I tell her that her perspective is valid for my purposes, as she has been observing how things work in this town practically her entire lifetime.

It is striking that being from a place is so important in all three of my sites, and that anyone who is not born here lets me know immediately that they are illegitimate spokespersons in a sense: *"No soy de aquí"* ["I am not from here"], they say immediately, and *"aquí"* is very specific geographical place to which you are attached via your grandparents and land. People who are definitely *"from here"* make it clear to people who are not—even those born "here" but whose

parents or grandparents were not—that their voice is not representative of local interests.

Only true locals, *"los que sí son de aquí,"* have the power to speak for the community in Ocotepec and impact matters such as the gas station that was halted or the opening of the Governor's supermarket project. I remember one woman who had married into Ocotepec telling me that people who are not *"de aquí"* like herself are not allowed to participate as observers or voting members in the town's *asamblea* [assembly] where issues such as sales of land to outsiders—*tierras comunales* or *ejidatarias* [communal and ejido lands]—are discussed. This is key to understanding the attachment to place that these food traditions and celebrations are all about. It is in part the need to belong that pressures Maria Teresa to meet social expectations and carry off this collective meal after years of living outside of the community.

Antoña says that there are many young women who do not cook anymore. "Why?" I ask. They are busy outside the home, and often have mothers or aunts or mother-in-laws to cook for them at home even if they are married. Some just do not like to, it is too much work, she says: *"No les gusta cocinar, es muy laborioso"*—and prefer to buy prepared food at the fonda. "What is it they buy?" I ask. *"Comida típica"* ["typical, family-style food"], the usual, *sopas y guisados* that other women make everyday in their kitchens.

I continue this discussion over brunch—*almuerzo*—with Maria Teresa's family two days later. Her father, son, daughter, brother and sister-in-law had been working all morning to clean up the previous day's fiesta and prepare for the

recalentado the next day. The recalentado, or heated up leftovers, seem to be the desert to every fiesta in the same way the meal served to those supporting the preparation the day before the fiesta is the appetizer. It became clear that passing on traditions to the young people in the family is a top priority for them, and cooking an indispensable component of these traditions, essential and inseparable from other components.

I take my leave after chopping ten kilos of carrots, already sore and with a huge blister on my thumb! Before I depart, I jot down tomorrow's menu: chicken with *mole*, rice, beans, and *tepache*, as well as soft drinks, brandy, and beer. The tepache, a typical drink made with pineapple peel and other ingredients[61] has been fermenting for three days. For the meal, Maria Teresa has gathered the following quantities: one hundred and twenty kilos of chicken; one hundred kilos of tortilla; twenty kilos of carrots; twenty kilos of rice; two crates of *jitomate* or tomatoes; thirty kilos of *mole*; and green peas, onions and garlic for the rice.

When I leave the indoor kitchen and step out into the house-lot garden, I find the abuelo drinking liquor, sitting at the edge of the cornfield with several men, including a son and a grandson. They are admiring the milpa—all reds and golds—beautiful with several trees in bloom (Figure 62). The few ears of corn left on the stalks to dry for *nixtamal* are outlined harshly but elegantly against the sky, the small milpa in this field surrounded by construction a fragile but definite symbol of resistance. The abuelo invites me over to the group, proud of and pleased with his milpa*;* he enjoys looking at it and wants to talk about it. There

[61] See recipe below, in this same section.

was about twice as much planted earlier, he says, but he cleared the rest in February to make space to receive the guests at the fiesta tomorrow. I take several pictures before I leave, but I am sure they will not capture the beauty and sensation of the experience. I can not even imagine how I would feel if I had planted and tended this milpa year after year, in the same place where I once helped my grandfather and father do the same.

Figure 62: Blooming tree and milpa in the house-lot garden

May 3, *Día de la Santa Cruz*

Mario talked me into leaving him alone at home after I picked him up from school. He is tired of eating *mole* and hanging out with his mother in kitchens and house-lot gardens. My other son, Juan, is on a school field trip visiting museums in Mexico City. I go to Maria Teresa's alone to celebrate the meal, very conscious of how inappropriate this is. I am anything but alone once I get there. While my research focuses on food preparation, none of it makes any sense without the final consummation of efforts so to speak, and the hostess would be extremely upset if I did not show for the meal. It would be a violation of the tacit agreement underlying the reciprocity network in which I too am participating here. A person contributes however he or she can, with work or money or both, and is not only welcome but expected to participate with family and friends in an event that recognizes and celebrates the community, generating and confirming a common bond.

I arrive at the cornfield to find row upon row of tables covered with white tablecloths. Several hundred people are seated and young girls carry large trays full of plates loaded with *pollo con mole,* and *arroz y frijoles* to the guests. Maria Teresa's family rented the tables, tablecloths, and chairs, paying for them months in advance. She did not want to risk not having enough on a day that many people in the barrio would be competing for the same thing. A big welcome sign hangs by the gate, made with the stenciled letters Maria Teresa's son and daughter were still cutting out last night when I left (Figure 63). The hostess, and several of the

women with whom I had been working the previous days, welcome me and usher me in.

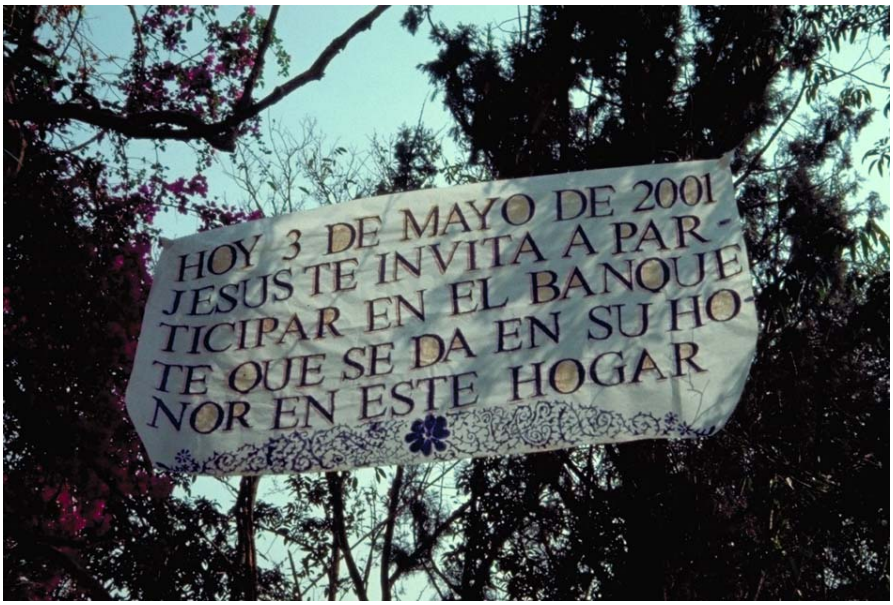

Figure 63: Banner welcomes guests to the celebration of the Holy Cross

Rosalinda and her crew are here. She quickly points out that this meal is not like the one I helped her prepare, though both were for the occasion of an annual neighborhood fiesta. This is the *"comida para todos los barrios"* ["meal for all the barrios"], hosted by the barrio de Santa Cruz for all of Ocotepec. This year, Rosalinda's meal had been for family and friends only. In both barrio fiestas, there were plenty of people in other households cooking for specific groups, like the musicians or the *promesas* from other neighborhoods and afar. In both cases, most everyone in the barrio celebrates, but some have greater community responsibilities than others. On this day, while the barrio de Santa

Cruz has its annual fiesta, many people throughout the region are throwing a party and cooking for construction workers in their homes.

As soon as she sees me walk in, Rosalinda sends her young niece running over to bring me to their table. She calls the serving girls to make sure I have a plate of food and hot tortillas right away. While somebody brings me a glass of tepache, Rosalinda figures I prefer beer and orders three cold bottles via her niece so we can toast. She and her friend chuckle at the resistance the little girl gets from the beer man; she makes him hand signals to indicate the three bottles are indeed for us. They cackle at the possibility of the man assuming an eight-year old girl might be running off to the cornrows to drink three bottles of beer by herself.

Rosalinda is enthusiastic and grateful about the pictures I dropped off with her cousin several weeks ago, a little album of the shots I had taken during the week I spent with her before the Palm Sunday meal. I was happy she had asked me to take pictures, as it had given me a formal role in the preparations—not one I particularly wanted, but clearly one she liked for me and which provided me a way to contribute as official photographer. Rosalinda said she had been sad to see me leave and hoped I would come back to visit. She suggests I come for *muertos* next year, saying a good friend of hers lost her mother this year and she would be helping her prepare the *ofrenda de cuerpo entero* [full-bodied altar] that is traditional in this town on the year of the death, and open to visitors. When I leave today, Rosalinda almost insists on going back to the servers to ask for a couple of plates for me to take my boys. She is practically scandalized that I would leave

without asking for my *taquito* which I not only have a right to expect because I helped prepare the meal, but which I owe to my children at home! *Ni modo* [oh well], another expectation I break.

As I leave, Lucía is at the gate saying goodbye to each of the guests, anxiously asking if they had been well attended: *"¿Los atendieron bien?"* I assure her the feast was excellent, and she said she hoped everyone else thought so as well. Her mother is crying when I leave—"*de la emoción"* ["from the emotion and excitement"], I am told later—so I ask Lucía to thank and congratulate her on my behalf. It is clear that hosting *la comida de todos los barrios* is not only a huge physical and financial effort for the hostess and her support network, but that the family reputation is on the line. I can see why Señora Rosa says she hates fiestas and that God has little to do with the ceremony.

May 4, *Día del recalentado y la junta de representantes* [Day of the leftovers and meeting of representatives]

Maria Teresa invited me to the *recalentado* [literally, "the warmed over", or leftovers] and meeting of the barrio representatives the day following the fiesta. Lucía told me the meeting began at 10 a.m. I spent the morning washing dishes and helping set up tables, and it had not started when I left at 2 p.m. Nobody seemed in the least concerned (Figure 17). Everyone assumed that after the Mass at the neighborhood chapel, people were still discussing things and trying to get the numbers straight before coming to the formal meeting.

When I first arrive, all the men are sweeping up trash and all the women are in the *cocina de humo* [smoke kitchen]. Someone is filling two huge barrels

with water from a hose so we can wash dishes. One young female in-law arrives and sits down to chat with the abuelo for a minute. When she gets up to join the women, Lucía teases her: *"Niña, que andas haciendo ahí? Las mujeres en la cocina!"* ["Girl, what are you doing there, women's place is in the kitchen."] The young woman explains somewhat apologetically that she could not just ignore the abuelo and get to work when he had invited her to sit with him. Gendered spaces are clear, but the authority of elders still has priority.

Gloria, the woman who cooked and served the rice the day before, tells me she went home at 9:30 p.m. and headed straight for bed, complaining to her husband about her aching feet. She got home comparatively early because she made sure to serve her rice first so she could go home. She is the first one outside of the immediate family here to help this morning. *Tía Lupe*, who arrives soon after I do, says her arm hurts from stirring and serving the *mole* all day. Besides the sore feet from standing, the sore backs from stirring heavy wooden spoons, among the casualties, Maria Teresa stuck a piece of firewood into her foot. She picks at it trying to get the splinters out. She went to bed after midnight.

The moment *tía Lupe* arrives she drains some of the water the younger women have put in the rice to reheat it, and scolds: *"¡Cuidado que así va a salir como arroz con leche!"* ["Careful, this way you are going to have rice pudding!"] Nothing is worse for a woman in central Mexico than mushy rice–*que se batió—,* except perhaps burned *mole* or half-cooked tamale*s*. Helping prevent these disasters in collective situations are a series of beliefs that keep a cook personally responsible for her food. Just as the abuelo is clearly the overall authority to

whom everyone defers in overall party preparation and family matters, tía Lupe is clearly the ultimate authority in the kitchen. Nobody here comes close to matching her reservoir of knowledge.

I wash several plastic pitchers that were used to serve the tepache, and gather up over eight boxes of empty beer bottles and at least a dozen empty bottles of *brandy Presidente*. When I ask why pulque was not served, I am assured that if it was, it would have all been consumed. Only recently, they used to serve tepache made with pulque, or pulque *curado*. The explanation I get for its absence is that if the tepache had pulque the children would not have been able to drink it. Today, the women will not serve alcohol until the meeting is over and the representatives are satisfied that the accounts are clear–"*las cuentas claras"*—and the commitments are lined up for next year. Maria Teresa's brother—who made the tepache—gives me the recipe and tells Lucía to invite me in advance next time they are going to make it so I can see how it is done:

> *"Se usa piña, pelada y picada; también la cáscara se usa pero se le quita la colita. Naranja, picada con cáscara. Tamarindo, sin cáscara pero crudo. Lima de bolita—de "chichita" para que me entienda. Clavo, poquito. Se cubre con agua y se deja tres días a fermentar. Se cuela y sale el concentrado como el que se compra. Sale muy agrio pero se le añade agua y azúcar en la medida que se necesita. Rindió como trescientos litros. El fermento dura ocho días."*
>
> ["You use pineapple, peeled and chopped; also the peel but you remove the tail. Orange, chopped with the skin. Tamarind, without the peel but raw. Limes, the ones with the "titties" so you know what I mean. A bit of clove. You cover that with water and leave it to ferment for three days. Strain it and you get the concentrate like the stuff you can buy. It is very sour but you add water and sugar to taste. We got about three hundred liters. The fermented concentrate lasts for a week."]

I ask about proportions and quantities, since the recipe has none, as is usually the case. The answer: six pineapples, thirty six oranges, twelve large limes (not what are called limes in the U.S., which are lemons in Mexico, but large grapefruit-looking things that are bitter but not sour or acid). 50-80 grams clove. About three kilos of tamarind. Covered with water, this makes concentrate for about 300 liters or more, when diluted with water and sugar.

Everybody wants to join this conversation about how things should be made, or how they should taste. *Tía Lupe* comments on the changes in *mole* verde, and how disgusting it is that some people now make it with cilantro. *"Aquí en el pueblo era con pepita y pasilla dorado y molido. Y se coce con caldo de pollo."* ["In this town, green *mole* was made with pumpkin seed and pasilla chili that was toasted and ground, nothing else. Cooked in chicken broth."] All variations are inappropriate and inferior from her perspective. Maria Teresa's brother, who is forty years younger than Lupe, disagrees.

Independently of the recipe, it takes skill to make *mole*. *"No toda la gente lo sabe hacer"* ["Not everyone knows how to make it"], she says. *"Se corta, da asco, hace daño"* [*"*It curdles, burns, or makes people sick"]. Everyone agrees with her and has a story to tell about somebody's *mole* that made them sick. Besides the recipe, what is the secret? I ask tía Lupe. One thing, she says: "*No se le pone sal. Se le pone la sal al caldo solo hasta que ya hirvió, si no se corta."* ["You do not add the salt until it is well cooked, otherwise it curdles."]

The conversation turns to home-raised pigs, which Maria Teresa's brother says are very common in Ocotepec. Tía Nacha insists they taste best because they

are raised on corn, including the water from making tortillas: *"No hay como criar su marrano en casa. ¡Qué rico! En casa es maíz, tortilla, agua de masa."* ["There is nothing like raising your pig at home. How delicious! At home they get corn, tortilla, and water from the corn dough."][62]

Before I leave, I ask Maria Teresa about funding for the barrio's events.

> *"Los representantes del barrio van a las casas a recaudar fondos. Se pide 280 pesos a cada casa. No importa cuantas familias hay en cada casa. Unos dan más, otros menos. Yo pagué lo mío y de mi papá aparte, para no eliminarlo de la lista. En la junta dicen, tal familia dio tanto, y tal otra no dio nada."*
>
> ["The neighborhood representatives go from door to door raising funds. They ask for 280 pesos per house (US$31). It does not matter how many families are in each house. Some give more, some less. I paid my father's contribution in addition to mine, so he would not be removed from the list. At the committee meeting, they say such and such a family gave this amount, and such and such family gave nothing."]

The very important list will be read aloud at today's meeting; announcing to the public who gave and who did not. That is why Maria Teresa, despite everything she put into the meal herself, paid double for her household, so her family name—both her husband's and her father's—would appear on the list.

"Why contribute?" I ask. *"Si no cooperas no puedes exigir."* ["If you do not, you can not demand anything of the community"], Maria Teresa says. And if you do, you can count on the community to help you when you need it. *"Si necesitas ayuda, te echan la mano."* She gives the recent example of her mother's death. As good-standing members of the community, the community immediately stepped in to support them. They begin by ringing the church bells. At this point,

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[62] The water in which the *nixtamal* is cooked is used for sweeping the house-lot garden as well, and is said to do miracles keeping the dust down because of the lime.

the women run to find out who died and what they can do to prepare for the nine-day burial ceremony, the *novenario.*

> *"Te ayudan con el velorio; llevan café, azucar, ceras. Para el novenario aquí se da pan, café, chocolate y atole. Al levantar la cruz se va a misa, a dejar la cruz en el panteón, y a la comida."*
>
> ["They help you with the wake; they bring coffee, sugar, big candles. For the nine-day ceremony in this town we give bread, coffee, chocolate, and *atole*. When you take up the cross, you go to Mass, leave the cross at the cemetery, and then go share a meal."]

With the stress and rush of preparing for the big meal behind us, today was the best day for conversation with the family and helpers. Everyone was reflecting and commenting on the previous day's events. The meal had been planned for five hundred but they concluded that eight hundred came, given the extra boxes of disposable dishes that had to be opened. I began the morning scrubbing cooking pots with pumice stones, and concluded with a delicious meal of re-heated leftovers, the recalentado. I listened to everyone talk, running to write in my notebook now and then. Something the abuelo said caught my ear. He was sweeping up piles of trash in the house-lot garden with his grandson. *"Una cosa es ponerse la corbata, otra es ponerse a trabajar."* ["One thing is to put on a tie and another is to put yourself to work."] That seemed to capture the aftermath of yesterday's celebration.

Chapter Six: Fiestas and the House-lot Garden, Tetecala

Tetecala de la Reforma celebrates two principal fiestas each year: Día de la Candelaria on February 2, and Día de San Francisco de Asís, patron saint of the town, on October 4. In addition, the local government and schools organize several lay celebrations, sometimes in the central plaza. The fiesta in February corresponds with one of the most important fiestas in both Xochimilco and Ocotepec. While Tetecala holds a series of events including a parade and a bull spectacle, an important part of the celebration occurs just prior to February 2 in conjunction with the neighboring, indigenous town of Coatetelco. According to local legend, a man from Tetecala found a statuette representing the *Virgen de la Candelaria* in the nearby Coatetelco lagoon. He took it home to Tetecala and built a chapel in her honor, but the people of Coatetelco became very upset and blamed the lack of rain and drying of the lagoon on the absence of the virgin. An agreement was reached and every year the people from Coatetelco walk to Tetecala to *borrow* the virgin for one week. After a week of celebration, a group of pilgrims once again walks to Tetecala to return the virgin on February 1, in time for her to be back in her chapel on her day, Día de la Candelaria. The group is received by one of the barrios in Tetecala on their return.

The annual religious celebrations do not include the same type of elaborate community networks and committees I found in Xochimilco and Ocotepec, perhaps due to the fact that Tetecala considers itself a mestizo

community.[63] However, there is a tradition of collective food preparation in one barrio that receives the pilgrims from Coatetelco. Perhaps not surprisingly, a woman originally from an indigenous region of Puebla has been in charge of organizing the meal for the past several years.

This section first provides a few glimpses of different aspects of the Candelaria celebration in Tetecala, then of two other different types of celebrations, a *quinceañera* and an *elotada*, or celebration of the corn harvest with tamales.

[63] Zero people in Tetecala reported speaking an indigenous language in the recent census (INEGI 2000).

February 1, 2001. ***Día de la Candelaria***

Today I took a break from the Niñopa preparations in Xochimilco and spent the day in Tetecala. Glad I did. What an event! Unlike Xochimilco, which has at least one fiesta every day of the year, this town has only two major celebrations, Día de la Candelaria, today, and San Francisco's saint's day in October. Both are celebrated in a carnavalesque fashion, with a *mojiganga* street parade complete with giant doll-like figures called *gigantonas,* masks and plenty of alcohol. There are no chinelos, though the giant figures dance and spin to jittery tunes very much like chinelo music. I am surprised to find the most important figures in today's parade are imported: Woody the cowboy from the American Toy Story, and Picachú the character from Japan's popular Pokemon. Yet as I drove into town this morning I caught the tail end of a very different sort of parade, more of a pilgrimage, and more familiar to me from my experiences in Xochimilco. I noticed a large group of people on foot in a barrio to the left of the road by the ISSSTE clinic. I will have to investigate that later. Today, I am in town because several informants specifically invited me to the parade and associated festivities.

Figure 64: Drunken bull in the parade

Ingredients in today's parade include *cohetes,* though nothing like the extravagance of Xochimilco. No *castillo*s, just the basic fireworks shooting up in the air as we walk down the street. No major collective food preparation as far as I can see, though there are plenty of booths set up in the plaza with food for sale. It appears that the celebration here is much more in the street than in anybody's yard.

Alcohol is a key ingredient here, in the form of *agua brava,* [wild water][64] The parade winds through the streets and heads for the bullring on the edge of town, where many people wearing masks and disguises will participate in a contest. By that time, many of the disguised characters, including a "bull" consisting of two young men sporting a bull outfit, can hardly walk. The bull fell over so often during the parade that several times I was sure the guys inside were injured (Figure 64). But each time they fell, somebody resuscitated them by

[64] Pretty much the same as Ocotepec's "agua loca," a very strong drink made of sugar-cane alcohol.

pouring more agua brava into their mouths. Somehow, they would make it back onto their feet and teeter forward, only to trip and fall again shortly thereafter.

Figure 65: Girls in tar

Today is also the day when *diablos* [devils] chase people—especially pretty girls—all over the street, grabbing them with tar-covered hands. Everybody who wants to play, and some who do not, end up covered in tar (Figure 65).

March 22, 2001. Investigating *la Candelaria* with Doña Eustoquia

I am still trying to understand the food preparation behind the Candelaria celebration in this town. After a long day in Zacatepec—sugar cane central—helping Doña Eustoquia claim her social security check, I ask her if she would like to accompany me in my search for the woman I was told is at the heart of Tetecala's reception of the *Virgen de la Candelaria*. It was a good thing she did, as I do not think I could have gotten past the front gate without her. Doña Andrea was easy enough to find. A dark woman with long black hair somewhere around sixty years old, all the neighbors in her barrio know who she is and directed me to her house. Getting her to let me in was another story.

As we walk up to her black gate, I know we are in the right place as soon as I spot the huge *cazo* in her yard, a metal tub that is used to cook *carnitas.* A younger woman, Nayeli, answers the door. She is outright suspicious and does not seem to believe that I am interested in food preparation. She asks me for identification right away, but before I can make it back to my car for the letter of introduction from the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) that I keep in the glove compartment for emergencies, Doña Eustoquia has talked her way past the gate. She swears I am legitimate, and introduces me as a student who is staying at her place and has been here all year.

Still seeking to establish some connection with my potential informants and reassure them that I am not dangerous, I refer to another kind woman who has been helping me around this town, Doña Magdalena. Everyone in this town knows who she is because she owns a little store that until recently was one of only two places where people could go buy anything from ham to soap. I explain that Doña Magdalena's daughter, Alicia, is my landlady in Cuernavaca. Once in the yard where we sit down for a brief talk, it becomes clear that both Nayeli and Andrea know Doña Eustoquia from having seen her around for decades. Doña Eustoquia shrewdly makes a point to ask about Andrea's daughter, from whom she used to buy *frijoles* at the plaza. Foodlinks.

From this tentative space in the house-lot garden I inquire about food preparation for the Candelaria celebration. Doña Andrea is immediately on the defensive: *"No lo hacemos como se debe"* ["We do not do things as we should"], she says when I ask about traditions and the Día de la Candelaria. Andrea is also

concerned that she is not an appropriate spokesperson because she is not from Tetecala. *"No soy de aquí"* ["I am not from here"], she declares right away. Doña Eustoquia immediately chimes in that she is not from Tetecala either. Doña Eustoquia is from Guerrero, as are most of the people in this town, and indeed its founders. Andrea is from a traditional *pueblito* in Puebla near Hueyapan and the crater of the Popocatepetl volcano, a place called San Miguel Tecomate. When I ask her to repeat the name of her town, panic and suspicion flash in Andrea's eyes, so I do not insist. Given the region where her town is located, however, I know right away that it is probably a place where the only appropriate way to celebrate is with *mole*. It is definitely an indigenous region. That explains in part why Andrea is at the center of her adopted community's collective food preparation for the annual fiesta.

It becomes clear in our conversation that Andrea, who has been organizing the barrio to support the arrival of the *Virgen de la Candelaria* for over seventeen years, feels especially guilty that in the last two years, and under the pressure of the increasing costs and resistance of the neighbors to feed an ever larger crowd who accompanies the *Virgencita*, they do not even serve *carnitas* properly. And of course *carnitas* is not even *mole* to begin with. As an economic and adaptation strategy she had the idea of making *carne de puerco en salsa verde* last year, so that the meat would go farther, *"para que rinda más*." And so, for two years, that is what they prepared, with rice and tortillas of course, as well as the usual fresh fruit water: *agua de jamaica, de tamarindo*, and *de sandía*. The first two drinks are the same ones served in nearly every fiesta in Xochimilco, with the

watermelon water perhaps reflecting the produce of this much hotter place. In the face of rising costs and increasing numbers of mouths to feed, and of neighborhood resistance to contributing to a meal with money or work or both, Andrea is not sure how long the tradition will continue.

Andrea collects one hundred and fifty pesos from each household in this neighborhood, which has clear boundaries and is separate from downtown Tetecala. Everyone pays the amount, but many complain, she says. For fifteen years, she made *mole* and *carne en adobo,* sometimes pork, sometimes beef. *"Ahora ya no, está muy caro el chile y llega mucha gente."* ["Not any more, chili is too expensive and too many people come to the feast."] Pork is the most common meat served for fiestas, she and Doña Eustoquia agree, because it is the cheapest.

Doña Eustoquia volunteers that she thinks that chicken or turkey, which is traditional with *mole*, is no longer served because "modern people" waste most parts—they do not like getting the gizzard or a foot of any one of the many parts that are served alongside the breast and leg and thigh. Pork or beef can be served in a chunk of meat and everyone is happy and there is no wasting, she says. I ask Andrea if she raises the pigs that are used in the meal. No, she says, they purchase them with the neighbors' financial contribution. This year they used four pigs, two crates of green tomatoes[65] and fifteen serrano chilies. Food seems to be a safe topic of conversation, as long as I do not ask too many questions, so I keep them to a minimum and listen to what she offers. Andrea is happy to share the recipe

[65] Called tomatillos in the US.

and quickly tells me the ingredients, including *"cominos, ajo, y hierbas de olor,"* ["cumin, garlic, and herbs."] The vegetables were all purchased at the main market in Cuernavaca. Some neighbors contribute more than the one hundred and fifty pesos. Some bring rice or sugar. One lady cooks an entire pig herself and brings it already prepared in *cazuela*. Many women come to cook, women of all ages, including young ones. They work together in Andrea's house-lot garden.

Why does she do this? I suspect one reason she is the one that does it and not somebody else is because of her ethnic identity and origin, coming as she does from a traditional indigenous town. This becomes clearer when I hear the women discuss *mole* in Tetecala and conclude that few people seem to make it from scratch. While Andrea does not make *mole* for the huge community feast, she says that of course she does for family fiestas. So the big cazo and other large *cazuelas* get used throughout the year, for smaller and more private fiestas in her household. Meanwhile, they are stored in another neighbor's house, a woman with more room who offers to take care of the big *cazuela*. Andrea is proud of her *cazuela*: she says it has lasted over seven years now and is one with *cuatro asas*, or four handles. She bought it from a traveling craftsman. I recently saw one in the local museum in Tlayacapan, the place in Morelos where I am guessing it was made.

All this conversation takes place in the house-lot garden, inside a square space filled with ornamental potted plants that make the place feel cool and shady despite the heat. Doña Andrea's answer to my question as to why she organizes the annual feast is that she made a promise. When she first arrived in Tetecala,

she was asked by a *"señora anciana de aquí"* [an elderly lady from here] to keep the tradition and never stop receiving the Virgin: *"Me pidió que no dejara de recibir a la Virgen."* While she is still fulfilling that commitment, its nature has changed over time. To receive the *Virgen de la Candelaria* nearly twenty years ago meant cooking for the dancers and the musicians; now it implies at the very least feeding the women and children who accompany them. The neighbors have changed too, and now Andrea is beginning to feel alone with her commitment and in the task of rallying everybody: *"Ahora no quieren cooperar los vecinos, no quieren seguir la tradición."* ["Now they do not want to cooperate,[66] they do not want to continue the tradition."]

Doña Andrea recommends I speak to the family who prepares the other meal for the Virgen, the ones who make *atole* and tamales to serve around 3 a.m. That is when the people of nearby Coatetelco come to get the Virgen to borrow her for the week. Later they return her to Tetecala in time for the townspeople to celebrate her fiesta. It is when she returns that Doña Andrea organizes the *comida* or main meal of the day. Each leg of the journey, the Virgen is accompanied by a large group of pilgrims from Coatetelco who walk with her. They carry her in the same way the Niñopa is carried, supported by four people. No wonder it looked like two different parades on February 2. There were two parades and rituals with very different ethnic characters and very different uses of space. One, mestizo, centered around the street, with food in the plaza for sale; the other hosted in a house-lot garden with a neighborhood working collectively, though somewhat

[66] "Cooperate" in this context means giving their share of the money *("la cooperación")* that each family in the barrio is expected to contribute.

reluctantly, to maintain a tradition that has a Catholic image but roots in an indigenous nature religion. The people of Coatetelco borrow her and give her a traditional reception in Coatetelco in order to keep the *Laguna de Coatetelco* from drying out. Otherwise there would be no more fresh *mojarras* (fish) or the hot *tamales de pescado* in the marketplace.

July 19, 2001. Follow-up visit with Esmeralda

Today I bring Esmeralda with me to speak with Doña Andrea. While Esmeralda's style is vastly different from Doña Eustoquia's, not to mention that she is about 50 years younger, once again it is crucial to have a neighbor with me. By now several people have told me that Doña Andrea is particularly suspicious of strangers because she lives right next to the Hacienda de la Luz, the place that belonged to the powerful drug lord known as *el Señor de los Cielos* [Lord of the Skies] who reportedly died in a recent plastic surgery operation on his face. The drug trade is a sore point in this town as in many others in this region, and I make it clear to anyone that brings it up that I am studying food, not drugs. It is nonetheless notable that for being an "unimportant town with no history," as many refer to Tetecala, it is in fact right in the middle of the drug traffic and kidnapping that characterize the region, in part due to its relative wealth. With all this in mind, I have come with my UNAM letter in hand and wait patiently while Nayeli reads it over and over before calling Andrea. Esmeralda later tells me how amazed she was at their suspicion. She also notices—as I do—how they much prefer to address her than me. Lucky for me that Esmeralda, one of my key

informants and more recently my research assistant, is knowledgeable enough about my research that she is able to keep the conversation on track.

Andrea again complains of the burden she feels having to carry out the responsibility of the fiesta, with only the neighbors in her immediate barrio participating in the funding and food preparation, and so many others coming to eat. Esmeralda asks how many people come to eat and is shocked to hear that over 1,600 accompany the Virgen. Not all eat here, Andrea clarifies. Some bring their food and others buy it at the plaza. But plenty do eat here.

How do they prepare? Besides the cash contribution that goes to buy most of the ingredients, many women bring food from home to prepare in Andrea's house-lot garden. Some clean the beans, others fry the meat. The pigs are slaughtered in the yard as well. Sometimes it is a pig a neighbor raised for the occasion, others its one they purchased. This year one was donated in addition to the four they bought with the money they gathered.

Eventually talk turns to the fiestas in Doña Andrea's hometown, and how different they are from those in Tetecala. Esmeralda interjects: *"Aquí todo el mundo anda buscando pretexto para irse a bailar."* People here are always looking for an excuse to dance, she says. In contrast to Xochimilco and Ocotepec, however, the fiestas in this town tends to happen in private party settings like the quinceaños celebrations or weddings, where a family closes off a street or has music in their yard and invites friends.

December 30, 2000. *Fiesta de Quinceaños* with Doña Eustoquia

Doña Eustoquia was thrilled to be invited to the party, pleased to be treated as family. She was also happy to be able to invite me to a fiesta. She gave me a special printed invitation from her "niece's" family, complete with my name neatly stenciled on the envelope. I buy and wrap an appropriate present: a nice shampoo and conditioner for Silvia's long black hair.

We go to Silvia's house early, but the food is already cooking. There are several of the usual big drums used for barbacoa, and of course the *cazuelas* of rice placed over bricks and firewood, all cooking in the yard. The men supervise the meat and the women are in charge of the rice and beans. Silvia is beautiful in her white gown and poses with her plastic flower bouquet (Figure 66).

At the Mass, family and friends join the priest and thank God for life; he exhorts Silvia to study, to improve herself. After holy communion the crowd moves to the party site next to the chapel, where a DJ is already blaring loud pop music and coolers filled with beer and soft drinks await. We are served barbacoa, rice, refried beans, canned jalapeños, and of course tortillas.

The party takes place in the shadow of the *ex-ingenio de Atocpan*, one of several sugar mills that once employed most of the men in this region. Many of the guests are from Tabasco, where many of the sugar workers moved to work in the sugar industry when they closed the mills here. Doña Eustoquia is glad to have a somebody to share a beer with her. I do not leave before her sister, brother-in-law, and their family join her.

Figure 66: Quinceaños

March 31, 2001. Celebrating the harvest with *tamales de elote*

> *"Dice mi papa: 'Aquí no hay dinero pero siempre comemos bien!'"*
>
> ["My father says: 'there is no money here but we always eat well!'] (Esmeralda)

After a long day with Doña Magdalena and Doña Eustoquia, I stopped by to say hello to Esmeralda before leaving town. The last thing I had planned on was to be returning at the crack of dawn the next morning to make *tamales de elotes*. But here I am.

Figure 67: Fresh corn

"Ya están los elotes!" ["The *elotes* are ready!"] Esmeralda said excitedly when she saw me yesterday (Figure 67). Her tone and excitement reminded me of the fresh wine announcement in France after the grape harvest: *"Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrivé!"* Esmeralda said they had been wanting to get in touch to invite me to join them in making tamales de elote, something they do at the beginning of each corn harvest. They have two corn harvests in this region, this being the harvest of irrigated corn, the other the rain-fed corn in September. This was actually the second batch of tamales they were going to make in a week. And while it was a family affair, it was also a chance to celebrate with others, as people always seem to do around the corn harvest in this region—even in this mestizo community of Tetecala. Arnoldo, Esmeralda's brother, had invited a group of people who were not from Tetecala to join the family also. As it turned out, they did not appear. All the more tamales for those of us there! I returned home late that night with a bag full of a dozen or more sweet tamales, and another with a dozen freshly picked, freshly cooked elotes.

When I first arrive, I find Esmeralda's mother, Doña Carmelita, gathering dishes off the outdoor table and washing them in the *lavadero* [washbasin] facing

the lemon[67] trees. Clearing the table of dishes of food and scrubbing it down with lots of water and bare hands turns out to be a fairly regular ritual today, carried out by different women—Esmeralda, her mother, or her sister Sonia—at different times. Esmeralda is already peeling the outer leaves from the elotes; I join in and help with that task right away. The food preparation and consumption at the house, from dawn until we leave for the river after 5 p.m. takes place in the outdoor patio, a space dominated by the huge modern *tlicuil* or hearth, raised for comfort, and with three different spaces for fire to light the three huge metal, barrel-like tins of *nixtamal.* A chicken lays on a half dozen eggs, undisturbed in the middle spot, which of course has no fire. Other chickens and roosters run around the patio all day, two asleep in the *chiquihuite* basket at one end, one rooster almost catching his tail on fire on the coals we light for the tamales. This, along with most everything else today is a source of commentary, laughter, and fun.

We begin husking the corn at 7 a.m. We do not make the tamales until much after 11 a.m., eating the first ones at 4 p.m. At 11 Doña Maria Fernanda is ready to mix all the ingredients with her hands: *"Le voy* a *dar una movidita con la mano"* ["I am going to give it a little stir with my hand"], she announces. Of course the day's work is interrupted by the regular food preparation for the multiple family meals: breakfast, *almuerzo*, and *comida*. Finally, around 2 p.m., we put the tamales in the pot to cook. *"Se acomodan los tamales paraditos con*

[67] i.e. "Mexican lime" or *limón*.

las puntas hacia arriba donde no se tire la masa" ["You stand them up in the pot so they will not spill their contents as they cook."]

Figure 68: Making tamales de elote

The tamales are made by three pairs of hands seamlessly interweaving at different times of the day. The process includes husking corn carefully, cutting the sweet corn off the cob, grinding the kernels in the *molino* with pieces of cinnamon; breaking fifteen eggs and separating out the yolks, opening the cans of sweet milk, beating all the ingredients together in the *masa* for a long time, tasting and adjusting the *masa* several times; filling the husks with the *masa* using one large spoon for measuring, sprinkling raisins on top and folding them into tamales (Figure 68); neatly standing the tamales on end in the pan—three layers worth— and covering them tightly to be sure the vapor stays in; starting the fire; and of course, putting "ears" on the pot so the tamales will not hear any conflict or absorb any anger that would prevent them from cooking fully or well. Regardless of the religious affiliation, this tradition persists.

This family's recipe for tamales de elote, or sweet corn tamales, is as follows:

- *Un costal de elotes tiernos recien cosechados* [a sack of freshly harvested sweet corn]
- *Totomoxtle* [fresh, green corn husks] (the same ones from the fresh corn are used here)
- Lots of cinnamon, (about 1 Tblsp. ground)
- 1/2 Tablespoon of *Royal* (baking powder)
- 1/2 Tablespoon baking soda
- 2 cans of *La Lechera* (sweetened condensed milk)
- 15 eggs, yolks only
- 1/4 kilo of *queso rallado* (the basic grated white cheese that is available at every corner store in Mexico)
- 1/2 kilo cream *Alpura*
- 2 kilos butter, softened
- 1 kilo white granulated sugar (or more, depending on how sweet you want them: "*Eso depende de como lo quiere de dulce."* They added another 1/2 after tasting the *masa.)*
- Raisins

Doña Maria Fernanda takes the freshly-cut corn down the steps made of old grindstones to the family mill to grind. She carefully puts a couple of pieces of cinnamon stick into the grinding stones with each batch (Figure 69). Since I will not have a *molino* in Texas, she recommends I use about one tablespoon of ground cinnamon instead.

Figure 69: Doña Maria Fernanda grinding corn and cinnamon at the mill

Because we need the best husks to make the tamales, we cut the bottoms off the corn before peeling them. The outer leaves are thrown into one huge *costal* to feed to the cows later. The nicer, large, inside husks we put into a big tub so we can use them to wrap the *masa* later. After tasting the *masa*, the women decide to adjust by adding another 1/2 kilo of butter and a bit more sugar: *"¿Va a querer otro poquito de azucar? ¿O ya estará bueno?"* ["Does it want more sugar, or is it good already?"] asks Doña Carmelita. *"Ahorita la pruebo"* ["I will try it"], one of her daughters replies.

Pleasure, tasting, hands in batter, calm, taking time. The world begins and ends here. The tamales cook on high heat, coal in this case, for one and a half hours. "Listen," the sisters tell me at one point when the fire is whistling, "that means visitors are coming"—*"¡va a venir visita!"*

At the table, conversation turns to immigration. Esmeralda has many women friends from Tetecala who are working in the United States. Not all in one place, but always going somewhere that family networks already exist: Los Angeles, Phoenix, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, San Francisco, New York City. Some swim across the border, some walk across the desert. Esmeralda laughs,

remembering one friend's story of how she fell on a nopal and pricked her rear-end. Another crossed climbing the wire fence at Sonorita. She concludes the conversation by announcing her desire to go to Chicago, where she has an uncle. But, it would be difficult to leave and to stay away, she says. *"Como México no hay dos. La tierra llama. Siempre regresan. Ganan dinero y regresan, aunque sea en ataud."* ["There is no place like Mexico. The homeland calls. People always return. They earn money and return, in a coffin if necessary."]

Conversation turns to the subject of death. Many of Tetecala's immigrants do return in coffins, killed by AIDS, in accidents, or in violent crimes in the United States. Some returned alive and introduced AIDS to the local population: *"Aquí los que han muerto de SIDA es porque lo traen de allá."* ["Everyone who has died of AIDS in this town brought it from the United States."] The *"mujeres públicas"* or public women—as the government calls prostitutes here—were also infected by a group of men who returned from working in the United States.

Later, Día de Campo **[Day in the countryside]**

Finally, after eating lunch, everyone at the table disappears, only to reappear thirty minutes or so later, ready to pile into the pick-up and drive to the river to eat again! Soon after we arrive, Esmeralda's father lays down on the side of the river to take a nap. The women (including myself) wade into the river with our dresses on. The kids jump in; the young men play ball and swim against the current (Figure 20).

A group of very nicely dressed local girls and older women walk by, crossing the river at the spot where we sit. Esmeralda's mother tells me they are Jehovah's Witnesses. Several people come by to swim and to set traps for fish. Though this mango orchard is private property, it is play space for all. Or recreation and rest space anyway.

Before I leave town I stop to say hello to Doña Eustoquia. She, like my landlady Alicia, and the would-be sister-in-law who ate with us, was quick to tell me that *tamales de elote* are not usually as sweet as the ones we made, and that they are to be served with cream and green salsa. And yet they are the best I have ever eaten!

Tamales Nejos, traditionally eaten with Mole Verde

As we prepare the *tamales de elote* Doña Maria Fernanda shares with me the recipe for a traditional tamal that is typical in Tetecala, *tamales nejos*. I ate them at the Tuesday market—*el tianguis*—here one day. They are white and made with ashes, and wrapped in banana leaves instead of cornhusks. Unlike most tamales I have seen and tasted, they are not spongy as they have no baking powder. Perhaps they are more like what tamales were like before baking powder replaced the water used to boil the *tomate*s as a rising agent.

"Son muy trabajosos" ["They are very difficult to make"]. You have to stir ash into the *nixtamal* very carefully to avoid getting burned. For five *cuartillos* of corn you use five *cuartillos* of ash. *"Tiene que ser ceniza buena de palo, porque hay ceniza que no sirve"* ["It has to be good ash from clean wood,

because some ash is no good"]. Ash from charcoal would never do. After boiling the dry corn for one hour, *"se descabeza"* (literally, you take the head off, or separate it from the kernel) with the *ceniza* [ash]. Usually, you do this with or *cal* [lime] boiling with the corn. You have to put the ash in by the fistful very carefully. *"Ya que tiene harta ceniza, brinca y quema"* ["Once the boiling kettle is full of ash, it splatters and burns"]. *"Luego se saca el maíz, se talla bien a que salga blanco, y se lleva al molino*." ["Then you take the corn out and scrub it until it is white and take it to the mill to grind."]

> *"Ya le echas sal y manteca, y los envuelves en hojas de plátano, no en hojas de milpa. Se ponen a cocer y se comen con mole verde. El tamal de frijol se come con mole rojo, el tamal nejo con verde."*
>
> ["Then you add salt and lard, and you wrap them in banana tree leaves, not in cornfield leaves. You cook them and eat them with green *mole*. You eat bean tamales with red *mole*, *tamales nejos* with green *mole*."]

Like other tamales, these too can spoil if people are angry or fighting around them, or, *"si les tienes muchas ganas"* ["if you desire them too much"], like the *"mal de ojo"* ["evil eye"] that often affects cute babies in Mexico. *"No se cocen, o se cocen locos. O si las personas que los están cuidando se van, dicen que los tamales se van, no se cocen."* ["They will not cook, or come out crazy or half-cooked. They say if the person who is taking care of them leaves, the tamales leave too; they do not cook.]" You cannot leave them alone. Like children, tamales require special care.

To help prevent such problems, there are many tricks, like tying "ears" made of corn husks onto the handles of the vaporera. Today I learn another trick:

You can make a cross of chile guajillo, cover it with salt, and put in directly on the fire underneath the pan. I had seen Doña Josefina in Xochimilco make a cross out of nails and put it in the bottom of the pan when we made mixiotes, and several women in Ocotepec and Xochimilco make a cross out of salt, but never a cross made out of chile. In any case, the ritual is about blessing the cooking pot to ensure the food is not only good but plentiful.

Finally, on top of the tamales, Doña Maria Fernanda says you should put the *molcajete* or stone grinder *"para que no se cozan locos."* Interestingly, in Xochimilco, people use the *mano del molcajete* or "hand" of the *molcajete*—also called the *meclapil*—for the same purpose. The tamales are usually covered with an embroidered tortilla napkin, then with plastic bags, and then with the lid of the pan. Today, we have too many tamales de elote for the lid to fit on the top, so we put the tough plastic bags that every store around here gives when you buy something on the top to seal in the vapor. *"Tantos secretos de la cocina!"* ["So many kitchen secrets"], marvels Esmeralda, partly in jest.

SECTION THREE: BEING IN KITCHENSPACE,

LA COCINA

Section Three focuses on individual women's experiences and narratives in their home kitchenspaces. I present several key informants in their own words, with minimal editing on my part, as well as my own descriptions of their kitchenspaces. To stress the social nature of kitchenspaces in these communities, and that these woman are part of a web of relations to which they are firmly attached from the kitchen, I include the voices of other individuals who are part of these women's worlds. We catch glimpses and hear from Esmeralda as well as Doña Eustoquia in Tetecala, and Señora Rosa, Señora Cande and Doña Margarita in Xochimilco. In Ocotepec, we visit Maria Theresa, Isidra and Dolores, and Maria Soledad.

Chapter Seven: Kitchen Narratives, Tetecala

This chapter on Tetecala begins with entries from Esmeralda's own ethnographic notebook. I include Esmeralda's mother and her father, because Esmeralda's kitchen is in her parents' house and makes no sense without them. I conclude with Doña Eustoquia, a woman almost sixty years older than Esmeralda. If Esmeralda's cooking is at the center of her family and even the marketplace, Doña Eustoquia, on the other hand, is a relatively lonely widow, though she too shares her table with others on a regular if not daily basis. Despite being from different generations, both women are full of energy, opinions, and insights, are extremely expressive, and were very involved with my research. I rarely visited Tetecala without eating something at both of their houses, whether or not I was hungry. Esmeralda would send me home with some home cooked stews, perhaps a *chile relleno* full of spicy pork and drowned in fresh cream, and, always, her delicious tortillas. Doña Eustoquia would have something for me that she had gathered in the fields or would knock down a papaya or soursop from the tree in her house-lot garden for me to take back to Cuernavaca.

Esmeralda is a remarkably candid and insightful young woman, one whose talents in the kitchen are recognized by her family and others. Many neighbors and people from surrounding towns who visit Tetecala on market day do not miss an opportunity to eat at the family food booth where she and her sister serve food. She is a sharp, young woman caught between the demands of a traditional household and her interest in living beyond the parameters of the

kitchen in which she spends most of her time. Esmeralda spends most of the day preparing food for her parents and brothers, one or two men who periodically help her brothers and father with the land, and any guests who drop in. On Mondays, she cooks all day in preparation for the Tuesday market. In addition, sometimes she helps prepare food that her family sells for dinner on the street just outside their house.

Towards the end of my research year, Esmeralda offered to help me interview women in Tetecala. I gratefully accepted, but insisted that she interview herself as well, and write her responses in the notebook I provided for her work. Her twenty-two page response, including family recipes, in addition to several maps and charts of her kitchen, informs much of what I present here. Esmeralda is not typical of Tetecala, as there is not another woman quite like her there or elsewhere; but of course, every one of the women with whom I worked was unique. At age twenty-four, however, Esmeralda is representative to some extent of her generation's attitude towards the kitchen.

Esmeralda

> *"Recuerdo que siendo pequeña, junto con mis hermanos, vivíamos brincando de árbol en árbol de mango. En nuestra casa había una pequeña huerta de mangos y había toronjas. Ese árbol ya se secó. También tenemos aguacates. Mis padres criaban puercos y muchas gallinas. También recuerdo que teníamos muchos chivos, como unos cien. Mi padre le enseñó a mi hermano más grande a ordeñar las chivas y tomábamos leche de chiva. Tiene un sabor auténtico; parece como si te comieras al chivo entero!"*
>
> ["I remember when I was little, we lived leaping from mango tree to mango tree, my brothers and I. We had a little orchard in our yard with

lots of mangos, and a grapefruit tree. The grapefruit tree has dried up since then. We also had an avocado tree. My parents raised pigs and lots of chickens, and I recall we used to have lots of goats as well, about a hundred. My father taught my older brother how to milk the goats. The milk had a real authentic taste. The taste was so strong it seemed like you were eating the whole goat!"]

"Mi padre siempre a sembrado la tierra. Cultivaba jitomates, calabazas, arróz, cebollas, tomates, frijol y maíz. Recuerdo que mi mamá le llevaba de comer al campo; cocinaba un buen pollo en chileajo, una sopa de arróz, una olla de frijoles, y unas tortillas calientes hechas a mano, y junto con nosotros que somos cinco hermanos, parecía un desfile, cada uno cargando una cosa para comer juntos en el campo. Recuerdo mucho que siempre me tocaba llevar una cubetita llena de agua de limón. Y como íbamos caminando uno tras otro hasta llegar al campo. Algo que siempre me gustó escuchar cerrando los ojos es el ruido del agua; el sonido especial del correr del agua. Siempre me preguntaba si algún día esa misma agua volvería a pasar por el mismo lugar o si el ruido que produce es una despedida."

["My father always farmed the land. He grew tomatoes, squash, rice, onions, tomatoes, beans, and corn. I remember my mother used to take him his midday meal out in the fields. She would cook a tasty chicken in chili and garlic, rice, a pot of beans, and some hot, hand-made tortillas. And together with the five of us kids, it looked like a parade, each of us carrying a box so we could eat together in the fields. I especially remember that I always carried a bucket of lemonade, and how we used to walk one behind the other until we reached the fields. On those walks, I loved to close my eyes and listen to the special sound the water made as it ran downstream. I always asked myself if that water ever passed by the same place again, or if the sound it made was a farewell." (Figure 70.)

Figure 70: Río Chalma, Tetecala

"I remember Tetecala when there were no paved roads. When you walked, it was so dusty, it seemed like you had put talcum powder on your feet! In the springtime, I recall lots of pigeons of many colors—and the children running after them, including myself of course. I remember many friends who visited us every day. We would play *a las quemada, o las encantadas, o al avión*. *Hace mucho se los llevaron al norte."* [It has been a long time since they were all taken north.] They never came back. Their parents were very poor so they all left. But I remember how, when it rained, the dirt turned to mud and we would play in it and

come out with such fat feet—¡*unas patotas!*—that it looked like we had boots on! We could hardly run, but it was lovely—*¡era bonito!"*

"What I remember most was the smell of wet earth. I think Tetecala was a magic place."

"Things have changed, people have changed. The folks that keep the traditions, the tortillas made by hand, are the old folks[68]. My father says: the population goes up, but our *molino* business goes down. *Dice mi papá: 'Ya las mujeres son modernas, ahí van con su pan Bimbo y su mayonesa. Antes molían.'* [He says: 'Women are modern now, there they go with their white bread and mayonnaise. They used to grind corn.']"

"Mamá always cooked well, and *Papá* was very responsible with our daily expenses—*el gasto*—and is to this day. What I remember most was the smell of *elotes*[69] boiling with *tequesquite*[70]. And a pot full of *tamales de elote.* Those were my favorites. *Mamá* also made a delicious pork in plum sauce. *¡Uy, qué rico!* Yum!"

"I was always standing next to her by the stove observing how she cooked. She would say: '*fíjate bien*—pay close attention—so that when I am sick you can take me a plate of soup to my bed *aunque sea,* at least.' She would touch my head and say: 'I am proud of my children but especially of you.'[71] My mother taught

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[68] Esmeralda is 24 and makes tortillas from scratch every day. Because she uses a tortilla press rather than her hand to shape the tortillas, this is not considered *de mano* or by hand. Most young women living in the urban part of Tetecala buy hot tortillas at the *tortillería* every day.

[69] Sweet corn eaten on the cob.

[70] *Tequesquite* is a rock, which is used for cooking in each of my three communities in traditional foods such as beans or corn. Its use literally represents people eating the earth and referring to its flavor in a very direct fashion.

[71] As seemed to be the case in each home I visited that one woman from each generation received most of the kitchen knowledge, whether at the side of her mother, grandmother, or other woman.

me to cook. I think I cook pretty well, but I do not cook with the same order she does. I have combined things a bit."

"Nowadays, my family plants corn, beans, and sugar cane. In pots in the yard we used to have chili and *epazote*;[72] now we only have *ruda*[73] left because the chickens get to everything. *Se dice: 'prefieres patas o plantas?' No se puede todo.* [They say: 'do you prefer paws or plants?' You can not have everything.]"

"I help my mother prepare the meals these days. I go to the plaza to buy food and chat awhile with the woman butcher or other acquaintances. I have been preparing the daily meals for over five years. Of course, sometimes I punish *Mamá* and make her cook, but then she gets angry."

"I hate it when the beans boil over. And what bothers me most of all in the kitchen is beating egg whites: that is the most tiring thing.[74] Everyone says you should not get angry when you are beating the eggs if you want them to ever get stiff. And when you cook tamales, you must make sure to tie *ears* on the pot so they will cook well. Otherwise they get crazy—*se hacen locos*—and end up half cooked, half raw."

"Cocinar es como un reto de no fallarle. [Cooking is like a challenge you must not fail.] You have to achieve the right flavor and fragrance, and the dish

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[72] *Epazote* is a green, leafy herb often cooked with beans and other typical dishes.

[73] *Ruda* is the single plant, with the exception perhaps of aloe or *sabila*—always with little red bows tied onto its leaves to bring good luck—that seemed to be in everybody's yard that I visited. Used for medicinal purposes such as earaches, it is used in traditional medicine for purposes including problems caused by "bad air" or spirits, and planted to protect the household space from evil.

[74] Beating egg whites until stiff, for use in one of many typical dishes, including chiles rellenos, seemed to be on everyone's list of least favorite kitchen tasks!

must also look so appetizing that when you see it you feel you must have it—*que al verla se te antoje."*

"I like to cook. What I hate is sweeping: I feel like a pile of dirt is going to swallow me up. *Lo que más me gusta es poder compartir la comida con personas que aprecian a uno* [What I like best about cooking is sharing food with people who appreciate you]. What I do not like is when they abuse you and think you are the maid. In my house, there is always plenty of activity so you can spend the entire day cooking. *Tanto trabajo que da preparar la comida para que te la comas en un ratito. ¿Qué chiste es ese?* [Preparing food takes so much work, and then you eat it right up in no time at all. What kind of joke is that?]"

"When I am angry, I think my food comes out very spicy. When I am happy, I try to please my brothers and cook what they like. I think I only cooked with lots of love—*con mucho amor*—one time. It did not do any good."

> *"La comida creo que es todo un arte, capaz de conquistar cualquier corazón empezando por el estómago. Lo malo es que luego te equivocas de corazón y quieres correr! Pero sin la comida a lo mejor la vida sería aburrida."*
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> ["I think cooking is an art capable of conquering any heart from the stomach. The problem is that sometimes you get the wrong heart and you want to run! But, without food, perhaps life would be boring."]

"My brothers say I am a good cook. They are so demanding! *El sabor de mi comida lo tienen bien identificado y les gusta mucho lo que les hago; es raro que lleguen a renegar.* [They recognize the particular flavor of my cooking, and they like what I prepare; rarely do they complain.] They are pretty obnoxious if

somebody else cooks besides me or my mother.[75] But with me, rare is the time they complain. When they especially like my *comida* (mid-day meal) they ask for more at dinner or simply eat a lot.[76]"

> *"Imagínate un día sin cocineras, sin nadie que atienda a esos exigentes hombres. Sería todo un relajo! Yo creo que ellos, por más que intentaran hacer las cosas, todo les saldría mal. Así que somos un mal necesario para todos. Creo que somos más activas y creativas."*
>
> ["Imagine a day without *cocineras*, with nobody to wait on those demanding men. It would be such a mess! I think no matter how hard they would try, things would not come out right, so, we are a necessary evil for everyone. I think we are more active and creative than they are."]

"The trick to cooking delicious food is to season things slowly, have just the right amount of salt, and take things off the heat at just the right moment, when the food is just right, *en su punto.* For *mole*, you give it the master's touch by cooking it in a clay pot, and adding all the ingredients like sesame seeds, almonds, bread, tortilla, chocolate, tomato, onion, green tomato, raisins.[77] To cook beans you have to be sure not to uncover them very much, and to mix two types of beans, one for flavor and one for appearance. For great rice, you cook it with a couple of chicken feet, a few livers, and be sure to use chicken broth instead of water. *Atole* is best with cow's milk,[78] cinnamon, and cooked over a low heat. For great pineapple tamales you have to grind the cornmeal to just the right

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[75] Sometimes in the past, Esmeralda's sister who lives across the street, or an aunt that comes in to help with the dishes, would cook for the family. Esmeralda does most of the everyday cooking now, in part because her cooking is so good and in such demand by her brothers.

[76] Nearly all of the women I interviewed said they gaged people's appreciation of their work in the kitchen by how much they ate or if they had seconds, rather than any overt recognition.

[77] Esmeralda's family buys big bucketfuls of mole paste from Guerrero and uses it as a base for their mole, though they add fresh ingredients including both the basics (listed above) and, typical to many ingredients in Tetecala, fruit, in this case plantain and apple.

[78] Meaning fresh, raw cow's milk.

consistency, *pallenada* we call it, and beat it with plenty of butter and *Royal* (baking powder). Cook plenty of pineapple with sugar separately to make preserve. In the green corn husk, or *totomoxtle*, you put a bit of the *masa* that you prepared with a piece of pineapple and you cook it over vapor for more or less an hour and a half and then you are set, *lista*."

> *"Hay frijoles que aquí se dan pero salen como una piedra—como el pinto o coconito que de Canadá sale blandito. De niña me gustaba un frijol sabroso, dulce, que se llamaba "gota de agua" pero ya hace como cinco o seis años que no hay. Otro que antes había es el 'bola'; ahora hay el 'recortado' que es parecido. Había uno que se llamaba 'ojo de cabra' que se perdió hace como doce años; ese se parecía al coconito. El frijol 'canario Sinaloa' también ya no existe. Se vende el frijol huevito, uno blanco que se hace con carne de puerco en adobo. Todos los frijoles son diferentes en cuanto a como se cocen y como saben. Por ejemplo, el peruano se coce blanco como si fueran habas, pero su sabor es desabrido—no sabe a nada. Lo compran por lo blanco, que se cozan bonitos. El frijol cacahuate se coce más prieto pero sale más sabroso. A la gente le gusta ver su olla de frijoles blancos. Pero el secreto de la cocina es este: le pones medio de peruano y medio de otro para tener bonitos y sabrosos. Se emparejan en el sabor y se emparejan en el color. Y ya. Ya tienes frijoles tantos sabrosos como bonitos, blancos. La cocina es para ingeniarselas!"*
>
> ["There are beans that grow here but they come out hard as rocks—like the *pinto* or *coconito* that is nice and tender when it comes from Canada. When I was a little girl, I liked a sweet, tasty bean that was called *raindrop* but it has not existed for about five or six years. Another one we used to have is *bola*; now there is one called *recortado* that is similar. There was also one called *goat's eye* that was lost about twelve years ago; that one was similar to the *coconito*.[79] The bean called *canario Sinaloa* does not exist any more either. A bean called *huevito* or egg is sold that is cooked with pork in *adobo* or red chili sauce. All beans are different in terms of how they are cooked and how they taste. For instance, *el peruano*—the Peruvian—cooks till tender as if it were fava bean, but its flavor is bland—it does not taste like anything. People buy it because it is

[79] In all of my communities, women recalled a diversity of foodstuffs that had since disappeared with great sadness.

white and cooks pretty.[80] Peanut beans cook darker but are tastier. People like to see their pot full of white beans.[81] But the secret in the kitchen is this: use half Peruvian and half of another to get pretty and tasty beans. The flavor and the appearance even out. And there you go. You have beans that are tasty as well as pretty, white. You always have to be ingenious in the kitchen![82]"]

"I usually cook in clay pots, though I cook beans in an enamel pot. It is faster. Normally, I make tortillas on the gas stove on a *comal* made of tin. Sometimes I make them on firewood, but rarely on coal. I use a hand-press, a *tortillera*, but we do make them daily at my house and they are delicious. I use the *metate* only to *amasar la masa*, and the *molcajete* of course for a good salsa."

"La licuadora, sabes, a veces hago trampa, más cuando es una salsa de cacahuate, da mucho trabajo moler el cacahuate con los chiles así que lo muelo en la licuadora nada más para que se muela poquito, que quede pallenado, y lo vacío en el molcajete; le doy unos tejolotazos y lo paso como salsa de molcajete."

["As for the blender, you know, sometimes I cheat and use it, especially when I make a peanut sauce. It is a lot of work to grind peanuts with chilies so I grind it a little bit in the blender, just until it is coarsely ground,

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[80] The preference for white or lighter colored foods, especially corn and beans, was particularly apparent in Tetecala.

[81] The discourse against dark colored food, and of the importance of balancing appearance with flavor by combining ingredients, came up over and over again in my three sites, as in the case of hibiscus flower in Xochimilco. In this case, the only explanation I could get to explain the preference for light-colored beans was that with so many flies around you never knew if a fly had gotten into your pot of beans if they were black. Unlike the black beans most common in Xochimilco and Ocotepec, in Tetecala, red or white beans were more often preferred, in the same way that white tortillas were much preferred to blue ones. My hunch is that the preference is linked to the ethnic identity whereby people in Tetecala like to distinguish themselves from the darkskinned people in the nearby indigenous community of Coatetelco who they often suspect of ill-will . On one occasion that I asked for blue tortillas at the market, my informant, Doña Eustoquia, explained to the surprised vendor that I liked dark ones, the ones from Coatetelco.

[82] This conversation took place as Esmeralda was selling a combination of two types of beans to a woman, who agreed with Esmeralda about how to select beans, and added a few "extinct" species of beans that she missed to Esmeralda's list. The cause of the "loss" of certain types of beans seems to be rooted in the market, with the arrival of inexpensive beans from the U.S. and Canada sometimes outcompeting local and national varieties.

and then I pour it into the *molcajete,* mash it a few times with the pestle, and pretend it is from the *molcajete."*] [83]

"Mi jefa me enseñó a cocinar, o sea mi mamá (Figure 71). *Mi papá me enseñó a recojer productos del campo desde los cinco años y mi mamá todo lo demás.* [My boss taught me how to cook, that is my mother. My father taught me to harvest products from the fields since I was five years old and my mother taught me everything else.]"

Esmeralda's mother, Doña Maria Fernanda

"Tuve una vida pobre, triste de niña [I had a poor, sad life as a girl]. My mother was ill. I had two sisters. *Mi mamá cocinaba muy sabroso, hasta un tlacoache nos hizo y nos chupabamos los huesitos* [My mother cooked very well, she even cooked a *tlacoache*[84] and it was so good we sucked its little bones.] We were so poor. My father tanned cowhides. My mother raised chickens and turkeys."

[83] Peanuts are locally grown and are used in a variety of stews in Tetecala. Esmeralda feels that using a blender for salsa is cheating but uses it to make her work easier, though without her father and brothers knowing it. Like using the hand-press tortilla maker, it is considered not right by some and the discourse is that the flavor is noticeably affected by replacing traditional forms of cooking, including grinding, with newer,more efficient forms.

[84] *Tlacoache* is the Nahuatl word for possum.

Figure 71: Doña Maria Fernanda embroidering in the kitchen

"I recall one time we ate a possum that fell into our water tank in the middle of the night. We all woke up. I held the oil lamp while my father and brothers butchered it. My mother cooked it with guava and mango leaves, avocado pits, bay leaf, garlic, onion and salt. She would bring it to a boil and throw out the water. Then she would add fresh ingredients and bring it to a boil again. Three times she threw out the water. *Para que no estuviera choquiaque* [So it would not have that wild taste]. After my mother died, my aunt took care of us. She cooked a *tlacoache* but we did not eat it. *Daba asco.* [It was disgusting.]*"*

"Las mujeres modernas son flojas: sus maridos venden maíz y ellas compran tortillas. [Modern women are lazy: their husbands sell corn and they buy tortillas].[85] *Las mujeres ahora ya no quieren ni saben cocinar* [Women today do not want to or do not know how to cook.] And the men, well, now their wives buy them *barbacoa* that is already cooked and just put avocado on top. One of my in-laws is such a disgrace, her husband has to wash his own clothes. She does not

[85]It is cheaper to buy subsidized tortillas at a *tortillería* than to grow your own corn for tortillas in Mexico, and most women prefer to stand in line for tortillas than to make their own *nixtamal* and make tortillas by hand. Nonetheless, the "young women are lazy now" discourse which I heard from older people in each of my sites and which is often a reaction to changes in the kitchen takes the form of blaming "lazy women" for the consumption of tasteless, low quality tortillas in Tetecala.]

iron them either. He puts them on while they are still wet. He comes to buy prepared food from us at the market. *No me gusta meterme, pero me dan ganas de decirla a la esposa: '¡bañate temprano y pídele a Diós que te quite esa pereza!'* [I do not like to get involved, but I feel like saying to his wife: 'get up early to bathe and pray to God that he take that laziness away!']"

Esmeralda's father, Don Benjamín

> *"Mi mamá era muy buena cocinera. Hacía unos frijolitos en bollo, con manteca, tan sabrosos que no pedía usted otra cosa. Me hacía mi asado de carne de res y de cerdo, y mi cecina de Iguala, o chorizo.[86]"*
>
> ["My mother was a very good cook. She made some special beans, with lard, so good that you asked for nothing more. She would make my grilled steak of beef or pork, my *cecina* (salted meat) from Iguala, or *chorizo*."]
>
> *"Ya ha cambiado la gente, compra su frijol enlatado. Y comen tortilla de polvo de las tortillerías. Le ponen polvo y la gente no repela. Se come todo."*
>
> ["People have changed: now they buy canned beans! And they eat *tortillas* made of powder from the *tortillerías*. They (the *tortillerías*) give them powder[87] and the people do not complain. They will eat anything."]
>
> *"A mí me hacen unas bonitas tortillas y unas patas de marrano envueltos en huevo. Todos los días me cambian el guiso. Mi mujer sabe cocinar bien—como mi mamá no. Qué sabrosas gordas hacía de frijol con epazote. Me llevaban gordas al trabajo; tomaba mi pulque."*
>
> ["They make me beautiful tortillas and pigfeet with eggs. Everyday they serve me a fresh dish. My wife knows how to cook well—not like my

[86] Unlike Xochimilco and Ocotepec, Tetecala shares many cultural elements from hotter climates and Guerrero in particular, such as the salted meat or cecina often brought to market from Iguala, Guerrero, or from Yecapixtla, Morelos.

[87] Don Benjamín does not consider the tortillas available at the tortillerías real tortillas, as he does not consider the MINSA corn flour to be real corn.

> mother of course. What wonderful bean *gorditas*[88] she [his mother] used to make me with *epazote*. They would bring them to my work [the fields]; would drink my *pulque."*]

"It has been 15-20 years since they sold pulque in the market here. In other towns, it is still available. They used to bring me my little barrel and I would drink it with chopped onions and chili."

> *"Yo no como crema artificial, estoy acostumbrado a la de vaca. Ya la gente se hizo puerca, le revuelve la crema artificial que vale tres o cuatro pesos el litro y la vende a veinte. Y los jovenes ya se hizo harto marijuano. Antes no. Pura gente fea a venido, sinverguenzas. Antes mi casa estaba en la orilla y ahora esta en el centro."*
>
> ["I do not eat artificial cream,[89] I am used to dairy cream. People are pigs now, they mix in artificial cream that costs three or four pesos per liter and sell it at twenty. And the young are all marijuana druggies. Not before. Only ugly (bad) people have moved here, shameless folks. It used to be my house was at the edge of town and now it is in the center.[90]"]

"Tetecala is modernizing with its surrounding neighborhoods, *se está modernizando*. *Tetecala era la gente más honrada de ningún lado* [Tetecala used to be the most honest people around]. Folks that live on the outskirts are bad, the people from here are in the center. Over fifteen years ago lots of folks arrived because there is lots to grab here: mango, avocado, maguey, banana.**…***llegaron gente porque aquí hay mucho que agarrar*. Many supported themselves that way, robbing. Once they stole one thousand of my mangos, I had two thousand. Only

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[88] A *gordita*, literally a "fat one," is a thick, handmade, corn dough patty with salt and lard and often filled with bits of cheese or pork rind. The best and biggest *gorditas* I have ever tasted are served daily at the plaza in Tetecala. They are slit open down the middle and filled with salsa of your choice.

[89] He is referring to the pasteurized, partially vegetable-based cream that is sold in stores in Mexico today.

[90]Tetecala has grown over the last few decades in particular, with new migrants from poorer states or poorer areas of Morelos settling on the outskirts of town, building up portions that were previously uninhabited. Don Benjamín and others in town who have lost cattle and other animals to theft often blame the newcomers in their town and region and are generally suspicious of them.

half were left. I used to sow seven hectares, no more. *Mi hijo siembra tres ahora. Puro frijol y maíz* [My son sows three now, all beans and corn]. He sells it at the market in Puente de Ixtla on Sundays and here on Tuesdays."

Esmeralda's Kitchen

Most of my conversations with Esmeralda took place in her kitchen. I showed up at her doorstep one day and told her father, Don Benjamín, that I was a university student interested in food traditions. I asked him about the family mill that I could see from the street. I had seen people line up there every morning, many with buckets of corn in their hands. He ushered me into the courtyard that was at the center of the house and up the single step made of an old grindstone from the mill, to speak with his daughter. Esmeralda stood in front of a stove preparing the *almuerzo*. They offered me a seat, one of half a dozen plastic chairs at the table behind the stove.

The kitchen was in the shade, neither indoors nor out. Esmeralda had sewn several grain sacks together to keep the breeze from blowing out her gas stove (Figure 72). "*Es bueno y no estás afuera. Entra aire rico, pero si está muy fuerte el aire, o llueve, se apaga el gas* [It is nice and you are not outdoors. A nice breeze comes in, but if it is too strong or it rains, the gas goes out]." Despite the fact that her kitchenspace had only three walls, Esmeralda would later express her frustration to me about older people's expectation that young women like herself live within the confines of "*estas cuatro paredes* [these four walls]."

Figure 72: Esmeralda's gas stove, curtain for wind, and tub for water

Don Benjamín soon joined us for conversation, leaving his seat at the door where he usually sat tending to the family's sale of grains, including the corn and beans grown by his two sons. He was happy to give me his opinions about changes in food preparation in recent years. Disgusted with the stuff they sell in the *tortillerías* in town, he claimed that modern tortillas are not made from corn at all: he does not know what they made them from, he said, but it is certainly not corn. On several occasions, trucks carrying what he calls "animal feed" from the United States have tried to sell him grain for his mill. On later visits, I would often find Don Benjamín selecting the best seed from his dried corn, scraping the kernels off carefully with his hands or rubbing two *olotes* or cobs together. Some he saved to plant in his own fields. Some he sold as seed to neighbors for planting their next crop.

Esmeralda took over in the kitchen a few years ago when she had to give up her first year of study at the state university in Cuernavaca because her father became ill.[91] She began cooking full time then, helping support the family from the kitchen, where she spends most of the day. On Monday afternoons and early

[91]In February of 2003, Esmeralda was happily back in law school in a nearby town, though she was still cooking most days at home. She was hoping to transfer back to the state university soon.

Tuesday mornings, her sister joins her and they prepare the food for sale at the weekly market, *el tianguis* that sets up in the town every Tuesday.

When her mother, Doña Maria Fernanda is out, another family member minds the store. Esmeralda, her father, or Sonia, the sister that lives across the street, take turns attending to customers that come to buy beans or corn, dried corn husks, soft drinks, or *masa*. Another sister, an biologist, lives in Cuernavaca. One of her two brothers—if they are home and not eating or resting—step in now and then to measure out corn or beans for a customer. Diego spends most of his time in the fields and selling corn and beans at different weekly markets nearby; Arnoldo, an agronomist engineer, is in charge of a large mango orchard just before the next town.

I joined Esmeralda's family at the kitchen table on several occasions throughout the year, sometimes bringing my children, and on one occasion even my advisor from the University of Texas. I visited once or twice a week, and sometimes on weekends. Arnoldo showed me around the mango orchard, and I walked to the family fields with Diego once to observe how he prepared the fields for planting (Figure 73). Most often, I came in the morning when the young men were at work in the fields, Don Benjamín was minding the store, and Doña Maria Fernanda was grinding *nixtamal* into *masa* for customers. I would talk with Esmeralda in the kitchen while she cooked, sometimes helping her grind spices in the *molcajete* or stirring the pots. As soon as I appeared, Esmeralda would call out a greeting—*"¡guera, ya viniste!"*—and make me a fresh, sweet tortilla which she

would offer with the fresh cream she knew I loved—*"de la buena"*—or white cheese, and a bowl of hot beans.

Figure 73: Preparing the corn fields with oxen and plow

On several occasions, I joined Esmeralda, her sister, and her mother to make tamales. Sometimes I made a couple of tortillas, though that was always a personal exploration rather than a contribution to the household. More often than not, I scribbled away in my notebook at the kitchen table while Esmeralda told me stories about the people, places, and food in her life. Doña Maria Fernanda shared recipe after recipe with me, instructing me how to make her dishes for my family, and wanting to contribute to my research. I always left with a plastic bag full of thick tortillas and a container or two of the day's meal or the *mole*, *chiles rellenos*,

or *picadillo* that they sold at the market if I had come on a Tuesday. Sometimes, I picked lemons from the trees in the courtyard to take home.

Esmeralda's kitchen was a place where I felt at home, where the generous spirit and kindness of everybody in her family—as well as their astute observations—helped provide me with insights into the complex nature and role of the kitchen in an agriculturalist family in Tetecala. It was also a place I knew my family and guests were always welcome and would be treated to whatever delicious food Esmeralda was preparing.

Kitchenspaces

Esmeralda's house is two blocks away from the central square, on the main street. Two wide doorways lead into the house, one to the *molino* that is Doña Maria Fernanda's space, one just to the right of that, where Don Benjamín or his sons sell grains. Between the two is a Coca Cola refrigerator filled with sodas. Customers often help themselves and leave the coins on the table, as per the instructions that Esmeralda calls down from her place by the stove. Walking into the covered area where the various economic transactions take place through either entrance, or simply walking by on the street when the doors are open, which they are throughout the day, you are likely to see Esmeralda cooking on the slightly raised part of the kitchen to the right. From here, Esmeralda can keep an eye on the street, the family business, and the chickens in the yard, as well as the food cooking in her pots and the tortillas on the comal.

Given the key role that food preparation—including *nixtamal* for the *molino*—plays in Esmeralda's household relations and the family's economic strategies, the house-lot garden and adjacent food-related areas are extremely complex. Unlike many other homes which have an indoor and an outdoor kitchen, this one is somewhere in-between and spills out onto the traspatio. It serves the three categories of functions listed by Westmacott (1992) in his study of African American gardens in the American south: 1) contribution to subsistence, 2) utility as kitchen extension for household chores, and 3) for entertainment, recreation, and display.

Esmeralda's kitchenspace includes the key elements that I found in most kitchens in my three sites, though to an exaggerated degree in some cases. These include an outdoor water source and plenty of containers for storing water; various hearths for cooking—seven in this case—; several spaces and items devoted exclusively to storing or transforming corn, including grinding tools that are used on an everyday basis, such as a *metate, molcajete*, and blender; an assortment of fuel for use in cooking including firewood, dried cornhusks, charcoal, and various gas tanks; a variety of cooking pots and dishes including clay, plastic, and enamel-covered aluminum; live food, in this case in the form of over sixty chickens and several fruit trees; dried foods and medicinal herbs for teas; potted plants for aesthetic purposes (*plantas de ornato);* a caged bird, and, of course, a place to receive guests and serve meals.

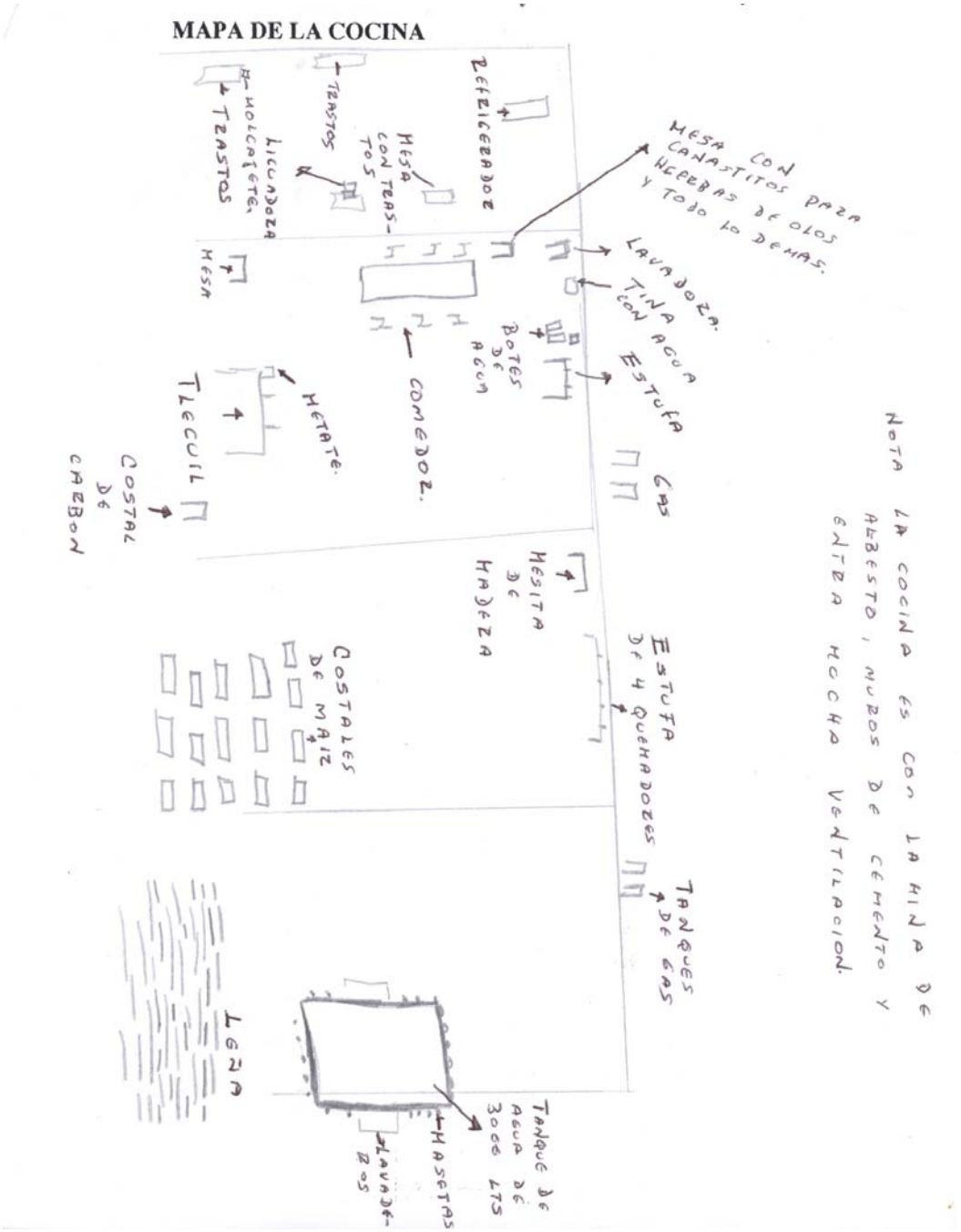

Figure 74: Esmeralda's map of her kitchenspace

This house and mill belonged to Esmeralda's grandmother, and it had become the family's primary residence. They have another house a few blocks away, where they lived before gravitating to the mill. Arnoldo, the older brother, stays there now, and takes care of various pigs, goats, and cattle that he raises in the yard. The roof covering part of the kitchenspace is made of rock, brick, and cement. Iron rods or *varilla* protrude from the top. Coke bottles cover the ends of the rods—*"para que no llame los rayos"*—so as not to attract lightning. Smoke billows out from under the boiling pots of *nixtamal* and fills the covered kitchenspace, filtering out the top at both ends.

In an effort to communicate a sense of the complexity of this kitchenspace in some detail, I have mapped the house and house-lot garden into ten quadrants. Excluding only the bedroom and the bathroom, eight of the ten are related to kitchenspace. I took a series of photographs and made an inventory of what I found in each. In addition, I asked Esmeralda to draw her kitchenspace and list the most common items and ingredients found there (Figure 74). The quadrants are numbered beginning with *I* at the water tank in the far end of the covered space as a starting point, continuing towards the only closed space of the kitchen, number IV, continuing with V, the long covered patio that hold the mill itself and the soda fridge and grains. The numbering follows a natural breakdown based on the pillars marking the connection between I and II, and II and III. The only uncovered space is the part of the yard that is directly in the center of the house, number VI. VII is a bedroom, VIII is a chicken coop (though many chickens are

loose), and IX is a bathroom separated from the patio with a curtain. X includes several food bearing trees and wandering chickens (Figure 75).

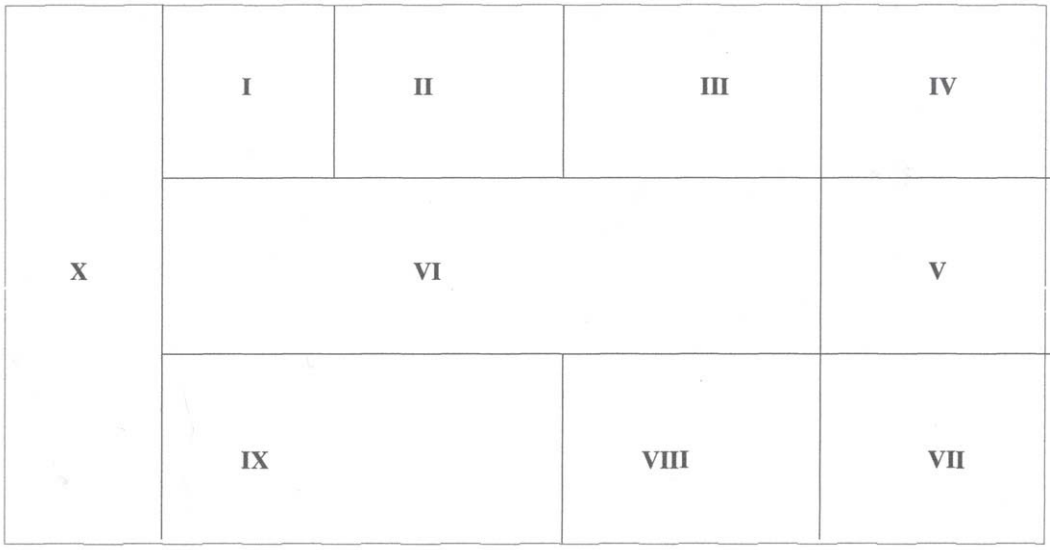

Figure 75: Mapping Esmeralda's kitchenspace

The space in quadrant I is dominated by the washbasin or lavadero,[92] together with a large water tank (Figure 76). Used primarily for washing food before cooking and washing dishes after eating, the lavadero usually contains a pile of dishes and oranges or some other fruit or vegetable. Facing out over the water and across the house-lot garden, you see the curtain that serves as a door for the bathroom, with a toilet and shower. It is separate from the rest of the construction and next to the chicken coop. Decorative plants are growing in pots along the sides of the lavadero and on the ground nearby.

[92]This water tank is exceptionally large, even in this hot region where they tend to be at least twice as big as I have seen anywhere else in Central or Southern Mexico. Esmeralda's explanation for the size is that for years, there was only water in the pipes a few days a week, and the tank allowed the family to have enough to last between these days.

Figure 76: Esmeralda washing oranges; *guacal* and three *braceros* on the right

Behind the water tank in Quadrant I—under the roof—are many different piles of tools and containers. On this particular day[93] I can make out the following: three *braceros*; one *coladera* or colander for washing vegetables and also used to scoop out the corn or *nixtamal;* a basket for carrying strawberries; a large bar of soap; an old container for petrol [*"una anáfora para cargar petroleo"*] that is no longer used; an old door; several brooms made of local brush to sweep the patio [*escobas de vara para barrer el patio*]; a wooden rung-ladder; a large *guacál* or box made of wood—*"del señor que vende cocoles el martes"*—that belongs to a man who sells a special bread at the town market on Tuesdays, and which Esmeralda's family keeps for him because the *colectivo*—or collective taxi—charges him extra to transport it. There are many sacks or *costales*—some

[93] July 12, 2001.

of plastic weave, others burlap—storing corn, beans and oranges. There are also several colorful plastic weave shopping bags with handles typically used in Mexico for buying food at the market—*bolsas de mandado*. One *costal* is used for the trash, along with a trash can, which is dumped into the garbage truck that drives by every three days.[94]. One sack labeled "*frijol* de Canadá," beans from Canada is being recycled to hold the corn grown by Esmeralda's brother. There are several other sacks of corn as well that the family purchased to prepare the *nixtamal* for the *molino*. Propped up on two crates sitting on their sides, there is a strainer of sorts to separate the chaff from the dried corn prior to boiling it with lime—*"un arnero para ceñir el maíz o quitarle el tamo*" (Figure 77).

Figure 77: *Un arnero para ceñir el maíz*

Quadrant II contains more sacks of corn for use in making *nixtamal,* a tank of gas, and a small tin bathtub—"*una tina de lámina"*—used to store extra water when it is scarce. There is another bracero, rigged with a connection for a tank of gas, that is often taken to the plaza to keep food warm on Tuesdays, or when making tacos for a fiesta. There is a large, tall basket or *chiquihuite* used as a laundry basket; two large birdcages; one large clay pot or *cazuela* for making *mole* when there is a fiesta such as a *quinceaños*; a dove in a

[94] Edible food scraps and compost are fed to the animals—the dogs, pigs, and chickens.

birdcage (*"cante muy triste"* ["it sings so sadly"] Esmeralda says*)*; a gas stove with four burners and a large jug of drinking water. A small table next to the stove holds some of the things commonly used in the kitchen: a bottle of cooking oil, the tortilla press or *tortillera*, coffee, sugar and salt. There is also a large sack of lime—*"un bulto de cal"*—the *molcajete* or mortar and pestle made of volcanic rock, and two plastic buckets. One of the pillars has a mirror and a bag hanging from a nail that holds a few toiletries—a comb, a brush, and a few toothbrushes. Here too, *costales* have been rigged to stop the wind from blowing in directly.

Quadrant III is dominated by the table which serves as a gathering and eating place for the family and guests, and the huge *clecuil* where the *nixtamal* is always boiled (Figure 78). In fact, there are two large tables, one pushed up against the wall at the very back of this space. On top of that table are the following: a bunch of dried flowers, a tool box that serves to hold money, a plastic bowl with dried herbs–the usual *hierbas de olor* or thyme, bay leaf, and marjoram,—cinnamon sticks and home-made breadcrumbs, as well as a container full of pumpkin seeds (*semillas de pipián*); a bag full of beans (*frijol chino)*; boiled mangos from Arnoldo's most recent experiment; a pot full of corn husks; a roll of aluminum foil, and vinegar. Hanging beside that table are two baskets and a bag. The bag is full of dried leaves from various trees for teas and home remedies: chamomile, arnica, black tea and medicinal teas. The two baskets are full of medicines from the local pharmacy. Under the table are the following: a *vaporera* or large aluminum pot for steaming tamales; an enamel-covered cooking pot or *olla de peltre*; a bucket of lard purchased at the butcher's, and a cardboard

box full of glasses made of glass for special celebrations. Next to the table is a costal full of charcoal, several buckets, and a half a dozen plastic chairs.

Figure 78: Huge *clecuil* for boiling *nixtamal* with hen in foreground

The *clecuil* is raised[95] and holds three large metal tubs full of *nixtamal* cooking over a wood fire. Next to them, chickens scramble and kittens and puppies play. Next to the *clecuil* is a *metate*, used mostly for kneading the cornmeal dough now—*para amasar la masa*—, though sometimes it is used to grind ingredients for the *mole*. Near the table—which serves both as the main work space and to serve meals—is an "Easy" brand washing machine with a manual wringer. There are also two small tables with three shelves and many baskets containing the following assortment of odds and ends: perfumes and

[95] Esmeralda says this *clecuil* can also be called an *hornilla.*

deodorants, matches, salt, chocolate, sesame seeds, cumin, black pepper, a tape recorder and music tapes, an electric mixer, popping corn (to fry in a covered pan on the stove). Attached to the pillar next to the main stove is the forty year old parakeet. The stove—an "Acroz"— was purchased when Esmeralda's parents were married thirty-one years ago. It has a *comal* and four burners, as well as an oven that is never used. When the family bakes bread or chicken, they use the baker's oven in town—*el horno de la panadería*. Next to the stove, near the washing machine as well, are two large barrels of water with a lid, and a large plastic tub, [*una tina de agua*].

Quadrant IV is what Esmeralda sometimes refers to as the kitchen, la cocina. A box-like room where cooking had not taken place for years, it had four walls, no windows, and two doors, one which leads to quadrant III where the cooking and eating occur, and the other to quadrant V where much of the family business takes place. The room itself is largely empty, with the exception of a refrigerator and a few cupboards where the dishes are kept. Esmeralda says her family pulled the table and gas stove out into the covered patio years ago because it was so hot, and they never returned them. Doña Maria Fernanda's dream is to have a formal dining room with new furniture in that space where she can receive guests.

Quadrant V is devoted primarily to grinding corn, and selling *masa,* grains, and soft drinks. There is a small soda refrigerator with a glass door, containing sodas distributed by the Coca Cola company and delivered regularly to the house by truck—*Coke, Manzanita, Fresca, Fanta, Sprite*. There are several

types of beans in large sacks, *Flor de Junio, Negro, Flor de Mayo* and *Peruano*. The latter, Esmeralda tells me, is a hybrid made from *mantequilla* and *canario,* and is from the state of Sonora. The family sells beans from Sonora, Sinaloa, Veracruz, Guerrero, Canada, and the United States.

Quadrant VI is under the open sky. It contains a barrel of water, a *chiquihuite* or basket of dirty clothes, two large tanks of gas*,* two crates of empty soda bottles, a broom made of local plants, and a picker-upper. Potted plants include roses and *limonaria.* Food-bearing trees include: lime, mango, lemon, coconut, papaya, *guaje,*[96] and guayaba. Plants in the ground include ruda, sábila, and ninfa, the latter for aesthetic purposes, *de adorno.* In Quadrant VIII, there is a chicken coop with hens, roosters, and one goose, though many of the sixty or so *animalitos* are loose. Esmeralda says there used to be *epazote* and chili, but the chicken ate them.

***Las cuatro paredes* [The four walls]**

Esmeralda is truly an excellent cook. Her food is favored not only by her brothers but people from miles around who are her regular customers at the family food booth on Tuesdays. Despite some recognition for her skills, she questions gender roles and the worthiness of her own role. She is not happy to spend most of her day in front of the stove, making tortillas and preparing breakfast, then the *almuerzo*, then the *comida*, and finally, reheating things for the *cena*.

[96] The tree bears small seeds in a pods that are very popular in this region and used in many local recipes.

> *"No se valora la cocinera hasta que haces falta. A veces hay que castigarlos para que ellos entiendan que haces falta. La cocina es triste porque no se reconoce. Es un trabajo perdido. Le digo a mi mamá: 'Aquí no ganas nada.' A mí lo que más me molesta es que me pidan de comer tronandome los dedos. Aquí creen que las mujeres fueron criadas para la cocina."*
>
> ["The cook is not valued until they need you. At times it is necessary to punish them so they understand that they need you. The kitchen is sad because it is not recognized (as important). It is lost work. I tell my mom: 'Here you gain/earn nothing.' What bothers me most is when they ask me to serve them snapping their fingers. Here they think that women were bred for the kitchen."]

Nonetheless, Esmeralda agrees with her sister Sonia that women are more responsible and concludes that women are doomed to maintaining their role in the kitchen. *"La mujer ya traemos el don de la cocina, y somos más organizadas,"* she says, [Women are born with a gift for the kitchen and are more organized]. *"Ya es como un mal que traemos"* ["It is like a sickness we bring with us"], she adds. Based on their personal observations, they conclude that women rather than men make feeding the family the top priority. Men, they say, often consider their own entertainment and even alcohol to be a right that comes before responsibility to their family.

Esmeralda had an opportunity to briefly experiment with professional as well as student life, enough to know there is more than the kitchen to life. After a year of social service working for a lawyer in town, she spent a year working successfully with the local government's accounting system, where her math and people skills soon had her practically running the office despite her low position and pay. Refusing to accept sexual harassment in the workplace, Esmeralda did not stay in her job after a change of *delegado.*

Like many young people, Esmeralda is frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities in Tetecala. Her brief stint at the state university was interrupted when her family called on her, the unwed daughter, to help out in the kitchen when her father became ill. Causing a certain amount of tension with her brothers that Esmeralda would just as soon avoid, her mother has willed her the house with the *molino* that once belonged to her father's mother, insisting that it is essential for her economic future, whereas the young men "*tienen más oportunidades"* ["have more opportunities"] and can make a living off the family land.

Despite having had a few suitors, Esmeralda is in no hurry to get married, or to embrace the commitment to a life of hard work in the kitchen which that implies in Tetecala. Nor is she willing to accept domestic violence, which all too often accompanies marriage in this region. Women's kitchen talk often turns to that subject. Esmeralda tells me the story of a younger cousin who married at age sixteen, disregarding Esmeralda's warning. *"Le dije que iba a tirar su juventud a la basura"* ["I told her that she was throwing her youth into the trash"]. *"Le fue rebien,"* Esmeralda jokes wryly about how "good*"* she had it before she finally left her husband and crossed the border illegally to seek work in the U.S., but she is indignant as she tells her story:

> *"La llevó a una casa de chinamal, de zacate y carrizo. Ni agua tenía. Tenía que lavar en el apantle y dormir en el piso, sin cama ni luz . Cocinaba en tres piedras, el clecuil, pero el original. Se iba por leña para cocinar. ¡Y además se la sonaban! Y se embarazó luego luego. ¡Le ha dado una paliza con su pancita! Me dijo que yo era una amargada, que por eso no quería que se casara, que yo era una quedada. Cuando vino toda golpeada, pues le dije 'ya te dije. Apenas estas en el mero apogeo y ya te van a tumbar las alitas!'"*

["He took her to a house of sticks with a dirt floor. It had no running water or electricity. She had to wash in the irrigation ditch and sleep on the floor with no bed. She cooked on the three rocks—the original *clecuil*.[97] Every day she had to collect firewood. She got pregnant right away, and on top of it all her husband beat her, even with her belly. She told me I was bitter, that was why I did not want her to get married, because I had been left behind. When she came all covered with bruises, I said to her: 'I told you so. You are just reaching your prime and they are going to clip your wings!'"]

"¡Yo soy enemiga de que si a palos te tienen, tu te tienes que aguantar los golpes! Quizas por eso no me casé. Yo le decía: no te dejes, no le muestres miedo. Al fin se defendio con el machete, y entonces la suegra se metió a defender a su hijo!"

["I am an enemy of the idea that if they are beating you, you have to shut up and take it. Maybe that is why I never got married. I told her: stand up for yourself, do not show him your fear. She finally defended herself with a machete and that is when the mother-in-law (that lived with them) finally stepped in to defend her son."][98]

"Tiene uno que ser más inteligente que ellos, pues ellos tienen la fuerza. Ahora ya se fue a Estados Unidos. Dejó su hija con su mamá. Dicen sus hermanos que ha cambiado mucho."

["Women have to outsmart men, since they have strength on their side. Now she works in the United States. She left her daughter with her mother. Her brothers say she has changed a lot."]

Despite the pleasure and recognition that sometimes accompany her many hours of hard work in the kitchen, Esmeralda resents the lack of options she has and the social demands—primarily from her family—that require her to satisfy the needs of her household from this space. Lumping kitchenwork along with domestic violence as part of the gender role assigned to women, Esmeralda is

[97] Esmeralda makes reference to our earlier conversation about the *clecuil*, since she had referred to the hearth where her family boils the *nixtamal* as a "modern" *clecuil*.

[98] Esmeralda was also indignant that the mother-in-law—who shared the hut in which her cousin lived with her new husband—had stood by when the girl was beaten and only got involved when her son was threatened.

conflicted about her future, not wanting to betray her family's expectations of her on one hand and yet not wanting to sacrifice her own dreams of a life outside of the kitchen.

Doña Eustoquia

> *"Ya no tengo tierra. La vendió él. Lo único que me dejó es esta casa y el seguro de vida de la caña. Con eso me la voy pasando. Lo de Juan Carlos va para arreglar la casa…hasta que acabe el juicio.*[99] *A ver qué pasa con la casa."*
>
> ["I no longer have any land. He sold it. The only thing he left me was this house and the life insurance policy from the sugar cane.[100] That is how I get by. The money from Juan Carlos [rent] goes to deal with the house—until the court case is resolved. We'll see what happens with the house."]

"If I win the case, I am going to leave the house to his two daughters. Both daughters were from extramarital affairs—can you believe it? I always worked hard, as he earned very little selling his sugar cane. I sold the beans that we grew. *Dejaba la comida hecha y a vender* [I would get our meal ready first and then go sell]."

> *"Cuando tenía cosecha en el campo, llevaba la bolsa con la olla de frijoles y jarros y cucharas y un plato. En el campo ponía la leña y a meter fuego—a calentar los frijoles y la tortilla y a cenar, y acuestate, y a dormir. Hacíamos un cucurrucho de zacate—amarraba las caña con lazo y nos dormíamos en costales en el suelo. Ha cambiado mucho la cosecha pues antes se usaba vara y ahora usan animales."*
>
> ["When we had a harvest in the fields, I would take a bag with the pot of beans and pitchers and spoons and a plate. In the field I would gather the firewood and start the fire—heat up the beans and the tortilla, and have dinner, and lay down and go to sleep. We'd make a little shelter out of the grass—tie some cane together and sleep on sacks on the ground. The harvest has changed so much: before we used sticks and now they use animals.[101]]"

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[99] She rents a part of her house out to a tenant from Mexico City who visits occasionally.
[100] Doña Eustoquia's third late husband was one of many sugar cane growers in the region who sold his crop by contract to the mill in Zacatepec.
[101] This represented modernity to Doña Eustoquia, using animals instead of sticks to plant your crop.

She did not always eat alone. It was impossible to visit Doña Eustoquia and not hear about one of her three husbands, all of whom she had outlived. She was lonely. Now her two dogs—whom she feeds bean broth with tortillas and salsa—are her primary company, though she maintains plenty of cats to keep the mice population under control. "Duquesa"—a gift from the geography professor who rents part of her house—accompanies her everywhere: on walks through the countryside, to the market, even to visit her sister in nearby Cocoyotla. For the latter, she hides the dog in a bag in order to ride the *colectivo* that folks around here use for travel.

Eustoquia, now seventy-eight, cooks mostly for herself, though she occasionally cooks for her nephew (a single father) and his daughter, and for her sister and brother-in-law. Her only son was killed playing billiards forty years ago. He was twenty-one. She has two step-daughters whom she refers to as *mis entenadas* and whom she visits frequently. Her first husband kidnapped her—"*me robó"*—when she was fifteen, a traditional approach to marriage in the region until not so long ago. He was thirty-two at the time, and was shot to death a few years later. Her second husband died, Doña Eustoquia explains, because a lover bewitched him. The woman sent him a cake that was full of worms. Soon afterwards, he died with a cut on his toe that would not heal, Eustoquia explains, with a big black worm under his toe.[102]

[102] The fear of being hurt through food is still common and is one reason why sharing somebody's food implies a relationship of trust. While many claim not to believe in such superstition, most women I asked recalled at least one example of its occurrence. Worms commonly figure in such stories as symbols of evil.

Her last marriage lasted thirty-four years, until her husband's death. Her third husband, she says, was a drunk and a womanizer: *"¡Era muy enamorado, le cachetée cuatro mujeres!"* Eustoquia's eyes sparkle as she tells the stories about how she caught and slapped four of his lovers. Doña Eustoquia was proud of having stood up to him. She would hide behind the curtain in the bathroom at the center of her traspatio with a bucket of water and throw it at him when he came home drunk or smelling like women's perfume. *"Un mes me duraba el coraje; no me le dejaba."* She stayed angry for a month. She was in part glad when he became a Jehova's Witness: *"Por un lado era bonito, les dicen que ayuden a la mujer, que no tomen, y que no cometan adulterio. Mucha disciplina, vaya."* ["On one hand it was nice because they do not allow drinking or adultery and they tell the men to help their wives."] Her husband's change in religious affiliation also meant that Doña Eustoquia's social world was drastically altered, as celebrations and food customs are markedly different and often become a source of conflict in small communities in Mexico that divide along religious lines.

Though her house consists of several constructions surrounding a courtyard, Doña Eustoquia's enclosed living space has been reduced to a tiny two-bedroom apartment on the ground floor. She moved into her small apartment after her husband's death. The bedroom has just enough room for two twin beds pushed together, a small dresser, and a closet which dominates the space. Her clothes and personal belongings are piled on top of one of the beds. When I spend the night and she has to move all her things onto the dresser to make room for me, I ask her why she does not use the closet. She responds that she has not found the

courage to go through her husband's things: sadness overwhelms her and makes her dizzy. Looking at his things gives her the feeling he is still alive, she says. It spooks her. The other small room contains her kitchen table, cupboards with dishes and a few jars of basics like sugar and salt, always a couple of tomatoes, eggs, and chilies, her water jug, and a small television. At night, Doña Eustoquia likes to watch the news and other programs on T.V. Usually, her radio plays ranchero music.

Beside Doña Eustoquia's stove on her small covered porch are a few plastic chairs for company. Whenever I eat with her we pull the table out there as well. On the edge of the porch she has a little flower bed in which she grows chilies, a few flowers, and *pápalo*, a favorite edible local grass of sorts. It is also found in the food booths at nearby markets for people to help themselves and put on their tacos. There are a few decorative elements—including a few rocks she brought back from her long walks in the countryside, and a dried ear of corn (Figure 79). When I ask her why the corn is there, she contemplates it for a while and responds simply: *"Está bonito"* ["It is pretty"].

Figure 79: Doña Eustoquia's decorative rocks and corn

The bathroom and water tank used for washing are outdoors and are shared by a family who lives above her, and the couple from Mexico City that sometimes come on weekends. The family living above Eustoquia's rooms do not

pay rent; she says she has them more to keep her company and for protection. Doña Eustoquia is afraid of the other neighbors who had taken over a part of her house—her deceased husband's relatives who were disputing her claim to inheritance of the property. Her "tenants" are a middle-aged woman named Evangelina, her son, his common-law wife, and their little girl. They, like most of the people in her network today, are Jehovah's Witnesses. The young man is a chief in the police force—*el comandante.* Doña Eustoquia always refers to him and his wife in hushed tones. The little girl is primarily in the care of her two grandmothers, and spends many days playing in the courtyard, often around Doña Eustoquia.

The principal drama in Doña Eustoquia's life today revolves around the legal battle to keep her house. A less worrisome distraction for her is the saga of the couple who are on the verge of separating, presumably because the woman is not assuming her wifely responsibilities under traditional gender models. Each visit to Tetecala I receive an update. The situation reflects not only the painful tensions in this household but many others in small communities where young woman are increasingly moving out of traditional roles. This young woman is the object of constant criticism by Doña Eustoquia and her mother-in-law, Evangelina. Eustoquia is scandalized that the young woman does not cook for her husband, eats cereal or milk with instant chocolate for breakfast, and worst of all, *"¡deja los trastes en la mesa como un hombre!"* ["She leaves her dishes on the table like a man!"] Every morning, she rushes out to catch a bus to the university in Cuernavaca, and in the afternoons she works in a local pharmacy, neither of

which Doña Eustoquia can understand, particularly since her husband has what appears to be a powerful position and is able to maintain her. She can not understand the young woman's arguments that she wants financial independence for herself and her little girl. Her imagination runs wild with the thought of a woman supporting a man that she might keep around for pleasure and decoration.

Figure 80: Doña Eustoquia's *bracero* with clay and enamel pot

Doña Eustoquia gave up a large, indoor kitchen her husband had built in exchange for the company of Evangelina and her family. This did not seem to present a problem, as she clearly prefers to spend her time outdoors, and uses her small covered porch and large house-lot garden for everyday food preparation. The indoor kitchen contains a table and a refrigerator in which she still keeps a few things. Eustoquia uses several different stoves located outdoors, including a gas stove that sits on her porch, a large smoke kitchen where she makes her tortillas over firewood (Figure 13), and a *bracero* that she often uses with charcoal for cooking beans in order to save gas (Figure 80). In the heat of the summer months, when the sun is so hot that she claims the ground is like fire and she has to water it to cool it down, Doña Eustoquia loves to sleep outside on the ground.

Doña Eustoquia's house is located in the center of town, less than a block from the plaza or zócalo that is the site of the city government, the jail, the permanent market, and the weekly tianguis. On Tuesdays, when the tianguis is set up and Tetecala fills with buyers and sellers from around the region, trucks and vendors crowd the street and sidewalk in front of her house. Standing outside the gate, it is easy to see if Doña Eustoquia is home. If she is not, the little blue, wooden door that leads into her rooms is locked and the gate to the street closed with a chain and padlock. On a market day she is always around, but if her door is locked on any other day, she is likely to be out of town visiting her sister, or in Zacatepec picking up her monthly social security check (Figure 81). If she is home, the dogs immediately start barking to warn her that somebody is at the gate. As you come close, you usually see clothes hanging on the line and ripe fruit fallen to the ground in her house-lot garden.

Figure 81: Doña Eustoquia on market day

The traspatio is strikingly neat and always well swept. Doña Eustoquia cooks *nixtamal* about once a week, boiling it to keep it fresh as needed. She grinds it in a hand mill she has on a tree and uses it to make fresh tortillas or *memelas*. Her yard is full of brooms which she made from brush she collected in the fields. Every morning when she sweeps, she uses her hands to sprinkle the lime water in which she cooked the corn, to pack the soil and keep the dust down in the yard. Like most courtyards, orchards, and indeed any piece of land in Tetecala, Eustoquia has fruit trees: soursop and papaya. She has papaya peel drying in strips in the yard and uses them to soak clothes before washing them in her outdoor sink, "*para que afloje la mugre,"* ["to loosen the dirt"]. She rarely uses her hot water heater, but when she does—usually for guests—she heats it

with firewood, although it is meant for gas, because the latter is so expensive. Every time I accompanied Doña Eustoquia on a walk through the countryside, she would periodically exclaim about all the good firewood laying around going to waste, promising to come back to get it later.

Figure 82: Doña Eustoquia making *memelas* by hand

Doña Eustoquia does not eat much: coffee and bread for breakfast and dinner, vegetables, a bowl of beans and her handmade memelas[103] for lunch (Figure 82). She eats eggs, fresh salsa, and plenty of fruit, from mangos to guayabas to zapotes, depending on the season, and always drinks fresh lemonade. Anything edible growing in or near Tetecala finds its way into in her kitchen. *Guajes*, flowers from the zompantle tree, *cazahuatl* mushrooms that grow on fallen tree trunks. She gathers fruits that are hanging heavy on the trees—especially mangos, *zapote negro*, plums, and guayaba—and vegetables that are left in the fields after the harvest: tomatoes, squash, green beans, and corn. *"Va uno a titichar, a recoger lo que dejan después de la cosecha,"* she says, ["one goes to "*titichar",* to gather what people leave after the harvest"]. *"Yo mi marido sola no me dejaba ir; con otra persona sí. Ahora salgo a pie con mi perrita, nos juntamos con otras*

[103] Memelas are hand-made corn dough patties like tortillas only oval shaped.

dos o tres señoras y nos sirve de paseo." ["My husband did not let me to go alone; with someone else, yes. Now I go with my dog, we join two or three other women, and we enjoy the walk."] Though Eustoquia has no teeth, she cuts hard produce like *jicamas* in half and scrapes them with a spoon to eat it.

Eustoquia loves to walk in the countryside. *"Me alegra el corazón cuando veo un árbol,"* she says, ["It makes my heart happy when I see a tree."] "*Ya no quiero venir. Cuando salgo al campo no me acuerdo de nada; aquí me acuerdo de todo. De lo que sufrió mi marido al morir."* ["I never want to come back. When I go out in the countryside I do not remember anything; here, at home, I remember everything. Like how much my husband suffered at his death."] She exclaims with joy at every plant she sees. On one walk she finds a rock she particularly likes: *"Como me gustan esas piedras boludas, y lo que pesan!"* ["How I like these big, round rocks; and how much they weigh!"] She carries it home to put alongside the ear of corn on her porch (Figure 79).

Doña Eustoquia was always happy for company when I visited. She generously shared her meals, taught me to prepare local dishes, told me endless stories, and patiently answered way too many questions. She introduced me to people and places she knew; she liked taking me to the market and having company for her walks. She told everyone she met I was staying at her house, that I was a student doing a *"tés."* She hated missing an opportunity to help me gather the information and knowledge I needed, and was very proud to be a part of my project. After introducing me to somebody she knew—which included people not

only in Tetecala but in nearby towns—she would turn to me and offer to help me interview her contact: *"Algún dato?"* ["Any data in particular?"]

In the fields and marketplaces we visited, she would eagerly gather samples of plants for me and tell me to put them between the pages of my notebook. Her knowledge of the edible and non-edible plants around us was astounding: everything had a name, a use, and a season. She cooked for me and sent me home with fruit from her patio or the nearby fields for my children. As I developed other relationships in Tetecala, sometimes I would visit her at the end of the day and find that she had heard I was in town and had prepared a meal for me. If we ate something at the market—often one of the huge *gordas de chicharrón* which truly live up to their name in this town, huge corn patties filled with pork rind and served smothered in salsa and cream—she often insisted on treating me as her guest. When my advisor from Texas visited Tetecala with me, she was horrified that—due to a miscommunication—she had not prepared a special meal to receive him. While her recipes were simple, they were delicious and typical of the region. They represented the meals common to people of her age and income level, and reflected what was available during a given season in the countryside and markets.

Chapter Eight: Kitchen Narratives, Xochimilco

Señora Rosa's kitchen is always full of people, including extended family, *comadres* and *compadres*. When her brother died, she raised her six orphaned nieces and nephews aside from her own five children, and her sister Josefina's daughter. The house originally consisted of two main rooms, one that is Josefina's sewing shop and bedroom, and was her mother's as well as her daughter Pilar's room. The second held Señora Rosa, her husband and five children, two or three to a bed. Now two of her children have married and left the house, as has Josefina's daughter. Another son, Camilo, has built a little room out of scrap wood—his *penthouse* he jokes—on top of the roof, while Jesús has built a separate room for his family in part out of the space the kitchen previously occupied. He built a small kitchen for his wife alongside his mother's separated by a thin wall. The wall is very important for family peace and allows Jesús's wife some autonomy, even living within Señora Rosa's matriarchy. Now, Señora Rosa's youngest daughter Beatríz, Beatríz's common-law husband, and their two small children share her room. Señora Rosa's husband lives with his married daughter, her husband and children in a separate house, though he comes by regularly on weekends to bring tortillas and money and to be fed. He also helps his daughter wash baby diapers and plays with his grandchildren.

Señora Rosa

"Me llamo Rosa Sandoval López. Tengo sesenta y ocho años de edad. Soy del callejón Bodoquepa, aunque no me gustan las fiestas. Aquí nací. Aquí nació mi padre; aquí mi abuelo tenía sus vacas. Se puede decir que mi oficio es cultura de belleza, pues lo ejercí durante diecisiete años. También fui trabajadora manual en una escuela primaria durante veinticinco años. Ahora me dedico al hogar."

["My name is Rosa Sandoval López. I am sixty-eight years old. I am from the *callejón* Bodoquepa, even though I do not like fiestas. I was born here. My father was born here. My grandfather had his cows here. You could say my profession is hairdressing as I did that for seventeen years. I was also a manual worker at a primary school during twenty-five years. Now I am dedicated to the home."]

"Yo considero Xochimilco como campo. Aquí hay muchas flores y verduras. Sus canales ya están un poco descuidados, pues ya la gente no los cuida como antes. La misma gente lo hemos hecho muy feo. Hasta las chinampas han cambiado. Hace poco nos llevaron a ver nuestras chinampas y ya casi ni las reconocíamos—ya ni tenían árboles."[104]

["I consider Xochimilco *campo*—countryside. There are many flowers and vegetables here. Its canals are not in very good shape anymore; people do not take care of them like they used to. We have ruined them ourselves. Even the chinampas have changed. A short while ago, some folks took us to see our chinampas and we hardly recognized them—they did not even have trees on them anymore."]

"Mi mamá murió en el hospital porque no quería comer lo que le daban. Quería chicharrón con chile verde y tortilla, y su nieve 'Yolanda'. Tenía ochenta y ocho años. No había usado zapatos en su vida.[105] *Guardaba sus costumbres. Recuerdo el 'chicharroncito' que preparaba cuando molía a metate. Hacía una tortilla grande y la ponía en el comal. Antes de voltearla le rallaba con un palito y le ponía sal. Cuando estaban fríos los cortaba en pedacitos y nos lo daba como desayuno con atole de masa*

[104] There is a big problem with theft on the chinampas. People steal trees, soil, grass, sometimes cutting the top surface and rolling it up to sell for gardens, as well as stealing any produce or flowers or animals. Many people told me they no longer planted on their chinampas because their harvest was always stolen.

[105] Señora Rosa did not use shoes until she was 14; Josefina when she was 18.

blanco con piloncillo en un jarrito de barro. Nomás le ponía una rajita de canela."

["My mother died in the hospital because she did not want to eat what they gave her. She wanted her pork rinds with green chili sauce and tortilla, and her Yolanda ice cream. She had not worn shoes in her entire life. She kept her customs. I remember when she made us *little pork rinds* when she used to grind (corn) on the *metate*. She would make one large tortilla and put it on the comal. Before turning it over she would scratch it with a stick and put salt on it. When they cooled she would cut them into pieces and then give them to us for breakfast with *atole* made of white dough with brown sugar in a little clay pot. She would just add a little bit of cinnamon stick."][106]

Figure 83: Doña Josefina's roosters

"Yo aquí en mi patio solamente tengo macetas con plantas de ornato. Tengo platanillo, agapando, aretillo, corona de Cristo, espada, rocío, belém, ala de ángel, ala japonesa, cuna de Moisés, ruda, y Santa María.[107] *De animales ahorita solo tenemos gatos. Josefina a veces tiene su marrano o sus gallinas. Jesús crío un marrano también para el quinceaños de su hija. Cuando no tenemos animalitos, el desperdicio que sale de la cocina se lo regalamos a los que tienen marranos. Mire—aquí lo voy juntando en mi olla. Las tortillas duras se las guardo para el abuelo de Antonio para sus vacas—se las remojan."*

["Here in my patio I only have pots with decorative plants. I have *platanillo, agapando, aretillo, corona de Cristo, espada, rocío, belém, ala de ángel, ala japonesa, cuna de Moisés, ruda,* and *Santa María*. Right now the only animals we have are cats. Josefina sometimes has a pig or chickens (Figure 83). Jesús raised a pig too, for his daughter's fifteenth birthday—quinceaños. When we do not have animals, we give the waste

[106] Atole is a hot, thick, drink made of corn—in this case corn dough—and often flavored with fruit or vanilla or chocolate. In this case it was just sweetened a bit and flavored with cinnamon.
[107]Señora Rosa sent a sprig of Ruda with her baby grandson when his parents and I took him out one night in a canoe on the canals. She said it was to keep him from getting "air"—*un aire.*

from the kitchen to people who are raising pigs. Look, here I am saving things in this pot. The hard tortillas I save for Antonio's grandfather for his cows—he soaks them for them."]

"En Xochimilco la comida es la misma de antes, según las costumbres. Solo se ha diferenciado en la forma de cocinada. Antes era pura leña y carbón y barro. Ahora se usa gas y peltre o aluminio. Aquí se come mucha verdura, tortilla, y tamales. Se acostumbra dar de comer cuando muere alguien. Según mi madre, comer carne frente al difunto es como comerse al difunto. Es una falta de respeto. Aquí se acostumbra que el día que muere la persona se da de comer a la gente. Si no hay mucho dinero, frijoles adobados con arroz. Si hay más dinero, romeritos con mole, y el tamal blanco (tamalate) de vigilia. A los nueve días se da otra vez comida, por ejemplo mole con carne de pollo o mole verde con pollo. Otros hacen carnitas. A todos les ponen su comida para llevar, su itacate. Si dan bien de comer en los nueve días, dicen 'pasó a trabajar el difuntito'."

["In Xochimilco the food is the same as always, according to tradition. The only thing that has changed is the way to prepare it. Before it was all firewood and charcoal and clay. Now we use gas and enamel and aluminum. Here we eat lots of vegetables, tortilla, and tamales. It is customary to give a meal when someone dies. According to my mother, eating meat in front of the dead person is like eating the corpse. It is disrespectful. The custom is, the day a person dies you give a meal. If there is not much money, you make beans in chili (*adobados*) and rice. If there is more money, you make *romeritos* with *mole*, and the meatless, white tamal or *tamalate*. On the ninth day, you give food again, only this time something like *mole* with chicken or green *mole* with chicken. Some folks make *carnitas*. Everyone who comes to eat is also given food to take home, their *itacate.* If they provide well—serve good food—during the nine days, people say: 'the dead person went on to work'."][108]

"A mí me da mucha alegría cuando ya voy a comer. Como con mucho gusto. Quizás porque pasamos mucha hambre de niña. Decía mi papá que éramos lombrices de agua sucia, tan flacos que nos veíamos. Lo que más me gusta comer es todo lo del maíz: tortilla, tamales, sopes. Y el pastel. Me gusta muchísimo el pastel, más si es de chocolate. Antes, aquí cada quien vivía según el medio en que vivía. Los que tenían más dinero, más carne. Nosotros comíamos más verdura y poca leche. Más bien atole de

[108] See Good Eshelman (1995) on the Nahuatl concept of work or *tequitl,* and the role of the dead in working with the wind and the rain to support the living.

masa. Ahora ya muchos trabajamos y aunque poco dinero, compramos leche y pan. Se come mejor hoy día."

["I am always overjoyed when I am about to eat. I eat with great pleasure. Maybe it is because we suffered such hunger when I was a child. My father used to say we were worms–like from dirty water—we were so skinny. What I like to eat best is everything from corn: tortilla, tamales, sopes. And cake. I love cake, even more so if it is chocolate cake. Before, everyone here ate according to the environment in which they lived. Those with more money ate more meat. We ate more vegetables and drank very little milk. Instead, we had *atole* from corn dough. Now many of us work, and although its not much money, we do buy milk and bread. We eat better today."]

Figure 84: Señora Rosa's stove

"Siempre me ha gustado cocinar. Me gusta cocinar de todo—solo tostar los chiles rellenos no me gusta! Y lo que me da coraje es cuando no tengo gas y tengo que hacer la comida con leña o carbón. No soy buena para la cocina pero me gusta cocinar. Yo me fui a trabajar por necesidad. Me quería casar y quedarme en mi casa. Yo aprendí a cocinar con la señora con quien aprendí a peinar a los doce años, con mi mamá no porque no estuve aquí. La señora me enseñó a ser útil a las personas que me necesitaban."

["I've always loved to cook. I love to cook everything—all except for roasting *chiles rellenos*. And what really bothers me is when I have to cook with firewood or charcoal. I am not a good cook, but I like to cook. I went to work out of necessity. I wanted to get married and stay home. I learned to cook from the woman who taught me to style hair when I was twelve. Not from my mother because I was never here. That woman taught me to be useful to people who needed me."]

"Pero eso sí, nunca aprendí a hacer tortillas porque me la pasé trabajando. Eso fue lo único que no me gustó de la cocina. Ni me gusta esperar en fila en la tortillería. A veces regreso a la casa sin tortillas y le digo a Josefina que ya no había—y ella va más tarde a traer. Antes se ponía a cocer el nixtamal y se llevaba al molino si había dinero. Si no, pues se amortajaba en el metate. Aquí tengo los dos metates de mi mamá—no lo hemos vuelto a usar en al menos diez años, no se han movido. Pero antes sí usábamos el metate, aunque sea para el frijol para los tamales de frijol. Ahora se lleva al molino. La licuadora no sirve para eso."[109]

["But I never did learn how to make tortillas because I spent all my time working. That is the only thing I did not like about the kitchen [making tortillas]. I do not even like to wait in line at the *tortillería*. Sometimes I come home and tell Josefina that there were none, and she goes later to get some. Before, we used to put the *nixtamal* on and then take it to the mill to grind if there was any money. If not, well, we ground it on the *metate*. I have both of my mother's *metates* here—I have not used them in at least ten years. They have not moved. But before, we did use the *metate*, even if only to grind the beans for tamales. Now we take them to the mill. The blender does not work for that."]

"Mi hermana Josefina también trabajó desde chica. A los siete años ya estaba cosiendo. Un día de chica se atravesó el dedo con la aguja de la máquina de coser. Mi papá le dijo que fuera a meter el dedo en el agua del nixtamal para que se curara pronto. Josefina se crió en una pulquería con una tía. Todavía hace unas salsas de pulquería, bien picosas. Josefina

[109] Though they no longer use the two metates, they will not give it to Señora Rosa's daughter Rosita who wants it for her house. The metate is no longer useful as it was in the past, where several women told me stories of their mothers marrying a man on the condition that he carried her metate to the new hometown. While it is still very laden with emotion and connection with the mother for some, in other middle and upper class settings it has become a symbol of Mexican roots. In Coyoacán, a district of Mexico City, metates can be found in wealthy people's gardens with a statue of an Indian next to it.

es la que le hizo de comer en la casa los años que trabajé en la escuela. Ahora yo hago la comida de diario; me paso como cinco horas cocinando cada día."

["My sister Josefina also worked since she was little. She was already sewing at age seven. One day as a little girl she stuck the needle right through her finger with the sewing machine. My father told her to put her finger in the *nixtamal* water so it would heal soon. Josefina was raised by an aunt in a pulquería [bar]. She still makes pulquería style salsas—really spicy. Josefina is the one who cooked for the household all the years I worked in the school. Now I cook everyday. I spend about five hours a day cooking."]

"Yo a mis hijos les enseñé a cocinar: saben cocinar, lavar, planchar. Hombres y mujeres.[110] *Saben hacerse sus nopales, sus quintoniles con venas, sus mollejas, su longaniza. A hacer sus botanas."*

["I taught my kids how to cook: they know how to cook, wash [clothes], and iron. They know how to make their *nopales,* their *quintoniles* with chili veins, their chicken gizzards, their sausage. They make their snacks."]

"En casa comemos más que nada verduras: papas, zanahoria, chiles poblanos, espinacas, coliflor, rábanos, lechuga. Y para el té, la canela, manzanilla, hierbabuena, la guayaba con pasitas y canela. También bebemos agua de limón o de jamaica. De carne, comemos un poco de cerdo y de res, pero más que nada el pollo y pescado. El pescado se come mucho en vigilia, como en Semana Santa y en Navidad. Los viernes mi papá siempre comía tlapiques[111] *fríos con tortillas calientes, y sopa de habas con nopales—bien sabroso! Mi mamá siempre comía pescado y frijol y huevo de diario. Ella siempre tenía pocas gallinas, como cuatro o cinco, y la canastita se llenaba a diario! Ahora los pescados que sacan del canal saben feo porque está sucia el agua. Saben a tierra húmeda. Nos los regalan y los hacemos en tlapiques*(Figure 84 and 85)*.*[112] *También el*

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110 Señora Rosa has three sons and two daughters and is proud that they know how to take care of themselves—but they complain that she does not let them cook in "her" kitchen.

111 Tlapiques are fish tamales, a local specialty, made by wrapping fish in corn leaves with chile and herbs and cooking over steam.

112 One of the noticeable changes in food traditions in Xochimilco is that of red meat replacing fish and vegetables to a great extent, something that is at least partly to blame for the tremendous increase in diabetes among young people there.

cerdo sabe feo ahora: pura porquería—ahora le dan a los marranos pura tripa de pollo con caca."

["We mostly eat vegetables at home: potatoes, carrots, poblano chilies, spinach, cauliflower, radishes, lettuce. And for tea, cinnamon, chamomile, spearmint, guava with raisins and cinnamon. We also drink lemonade or *jamaica*. For meat, we eat some beef and pork, but mostly chicken and fish. Fish we eat plenty of during abstinence periods, like Holy Week and Christmas. On Fridays, my father always had his cold tlapiques with hot tortillas, and fava bean soup with *nopales*—so tasty! My mother ate fish and beans and eggs every day. She always had a few chickens, like four or five, and the basket filled each day! Now the fish they get out of the canals taste bad because the water is dirty. They taste like damp earth. When someone gives us some we prepare them in tlapiques (Figure 84 and 85). Pork tastes terrible now also: pure garbage—now they feed pigs chicken guts full of poop."]

"Yo cocino según lo que tenga para el gasto. Si alcanza, un bistec o una pieza de pollo. Si no, lo mínimo es una sopa, frijoles, huevos con salsa, tortillas. Cuando eran chicos mis niños y había que usar el dinero para medicina o para la tela de los uniformes escolares, hacía mucho las tortas de papa. Para una ocasión especial hago mole verde con arroz y frijoles, o adobo. Para 'no desear'—así decía mi mamá, o sea, no desear que te inviten a una fiesta pues a veces no conocemos la gente en los otros barrios—para no desear, hacemos un poco de mole cuando es fiesta de algún barrio de Xochimilco."

["What I cook depends on how much I have to spend. If there is enough, a cut of meat or a piece of chicken. If not, the minimum is a soup (meaning pasta or rice), beans, eggs with salsa, and tortillas. When my children were small and I had to use the money for medicine or cloth for school uniforms, I made lots of potato patties. For a special occasion I make green *mole* with beans and rice, or *adobo*.[113] So we are not left with desire, as my mother used to say, that is, desiring that you had been invited to a fiesta, since sometimes we do not know the people in another barrio, we make a little *mole* when there is a fiesta in another barrio."[114]

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[113] *Adobo* is a spicy, red sauce made of ground dried chiles, vinegar, garlic, oregano and other herbs.

[114] Unfulfilled desire or longing is considered the cause of many illnesses in this entire region. The dreaded *mal de ojo* or evil eye, for instance, can make a baby become listless or cry alot, and is caused by someone looking at him or her and longing for a child. Unlike the United States, where it seems to be considered an invasion of personal space to reach out and touch somebody's

Figure 85: Señora Rosa making tlapiques

> *"También hacemos pipián con las semillitas de chile que vamos guardando. Por ejemplo, para hacer pipián para una semana, uso semillas de chile, dos o tres chiles anchos, semilla de anís, pasitas, cacahuate, ajonjolí, un diente de ajo, un pedazo de cebolla, y cuatro pimientas. Se come con carne de puerco, o se le pone nopales o papas."*
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> ["We also make *pipián*[115] with the chili seeds that I save up. To make *pipián* for a week, for instance, I use chile seeds, two or three *ancho* chilies, anis seeds, raisins, peanuts, sesame seeds, a clove of garlic, a piece of onion, and four black peppercorns. You eat it with pork or with *nopales* and potatoes."]

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child, in Xochimilco it is considered dangerous if you look but do not touch the child. Evil is transmitted in a variety of ways, one of them being food, which may be cursed by the person who prepared it, so that people are careful whose food they eat.

[115] *Pipián* is a dish somewhat like mole, consisting of a smooth sauce with ground seeds and chiles, though it is much more economical and not considered of the same status. It is probably more traditional than *mole* however, and is the "recycling" meal *par excellence*, based as it is on chile seeds that have been saved from previous meals using the chiles themselves.

"Lo que me gustaba comer cuando yo era chica era pescaditos fritos en salsa de tomate y tortillas de metate. Y el atole de masa blanca con piloncillo, y las gorditas de manteca. Las comidas favoritas de mi familia ahora son mole, mole verde, adobo. Pero para ocasiones especiales más y más se hacen las carnitas y la barbacoa. Están dejando el mole atrás. Ahora a mucha gente no le gusta el mole. Los hijos de la comadre dicen "ay guacala!"—es una grosería![116] Les gustan las chuletas ahumadas o la pierna para las fiestas. Cada vez se come más carne! Pero aunque los jóvenes coman muchas cosas que yo no comía de niña—las carnitas, el chorizo, la barbacoa, las salchichas, el queso de puerco—todavía la mayoría sí come mole y muchos antojitos. Los sopes son algo que a todo la gente le gusta—cuando están cruditos al día siguiente bien picositos!"

["What I liked to eat when I was little was fried fish with tomato sauce and tortillas from the *metate* (home ground). And plain corn dough *atole* with brown sugar, and *gordita*s made with lard. My family's favorite foods today are *mole*, green *mole*, and *adobo*. For special occasions people are making *carnitas* and *barbacoa* (meat dishes) more and more. They are leaving *mole* behind. There are many people today who do not like *mole*. My *comadre's* children say: "*gross*!" That is so rude. They like smoked pork chops and roast for a fiesta. People are eating more and more meat! But even though young people eat many things that I did not when I was a child—*carnitas, chorizo, barbacoa, hot dog,* pork cheese—the majority still does eat *mole* and many *antojitos*. *Sopes* are something everybody likes, especially served with very hot salsa the next day with a hangover."]

[116] Like other older women, Señora Rosa is scandalized at young people's lack of respect and taste for traditional food like *mole* and *frijoles*—and their preference for meat.

Figure 86: Señora Rosa making *sopa de pasta*

> *"A mí me da mucha satisfacción servir algo de comer y que le agrade a la gente* (Figure 86)*. Decía mi papá que 'es mejor que las ollas amanezcan al revés'—que se comparta la comida y no que se quede. Me gusta mandar a la gente con su itacate—su taquito para llevar. Aquí en Xochimilco se acostumbra, pero no en todas las casas se hace eso. Pero decía mi madre que cuando uno quiere regalar algo, hay que regalarlo antes de dar de comer, si no es como si usted está regalando las sobras, y eso no se hace nunca—es mala educación. Se regala todo, canasta, servilleta, comida. El intercambio de comida es como una convivencia."*
>
> ["I derive much satisfaction serving something to eat that people like (Figure 86). My father used to say 'it is better for the pots to awaken upside down the next day'—it is better to share food and not to keep it. I like to send people home with their *itacate*—their taco to go. That is the custom here I Xochimilco, though that is not the way it is in all the homes. My mother used to say that when you wanted to give something away, you had to give it before serving, otherwise it is as if you were giving away

leftovers—that is bad manners. You give it all away: basket, napkin, and food. The exchange of food is like a sharing or co-existing of sorts."]

The approach

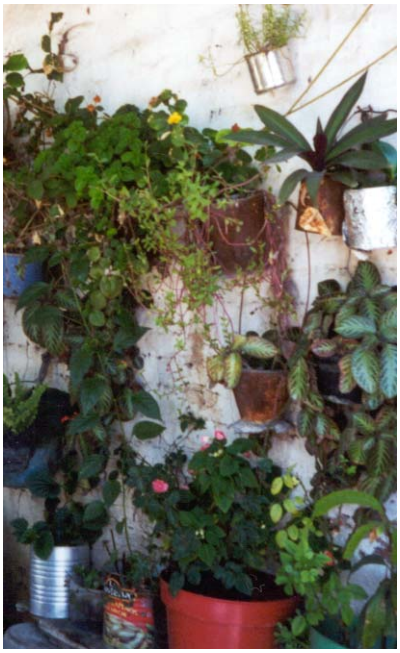

Figure 87: Señora Rosa's plants

The approach to Señora Rosa's kitchen is lined with plants (Figure 87). Visitors have to walk through the blue wooden front door, along the long covered hallway with the bedrooms to the left, and with the row of plants in cans and plastic containers on the wall to the right. The plants lead to the back and only yard, where a large number of plants announce the kitchen door. Here, an assortment of seating places invite you to stay: benches, tree stump, chairs. It is where Señora Rosa's *comadre* Marcela sits when she visits every weekend, where family and neighbors and special guests often sit before or after they eat at the kitchen table.

Beyond the kitchen is a small room that was Señora Rosa's beauty salon. Though it still receives plenty of use, it has become more of a storage area than a work place. Beyond that, a row of latrines and showers with cloth curtains to the right, and the multiple sinks alongside the adjacent canal to the left. Usually, at any given hour, somebody is at the sink: Señora Rosa washing her bucket full of

dishes, Josefina washing vegetables or chicken, anyone of the members of the household washing clothes (Figure 88).

Figure 88: Doña Josefina washing chicken in the house-lot garden

There, between the bathroom and the sinks, are the animal pens or chicken coops that have been in use off and on for years on end. They have alternately housed chickens, pigs, rabbits, or whatever animal is being fattened for slaughter. Animals that serve as a source of amusement and education for the children that are always growing up in this house, and running around the little yard, and up and down the hallway.

In the center of the house-lot garden, there is sometimes a pot of tamales or *mixiotes*. If not, then at least the ghost of *la abuelita Cleotilde* sitting by the fire, toasting corn on the comal for *pinol* to use in atole champurrado.

Señora Rosa's kitchen

Señora Rosa's kitchen was always a place for tea and conversation for me, way back since they day I moved in next door to her after the 1985 earthquake.

When most of the people in the barrio treated me with outright suspicion, she was always courteous and generous. If I arrived on the unusual occasion when she did not have tea on the stove, she would put water on to boil right away, throwing in whatever leaves she had at the moment, or a few plums from her tree, or a *tejocote* and an apple and a cinnamon stick. Maybe a few raisins. Back then, knowing I only drank boiled water, she usually kept a pot of tea going for my children and myself. There was always *un tesito* and something to eat. And if I did not visit on a given day, she might come knocking at my door, bringing me a plate of something she knew I liked: *"Le traje unas enchiladas,"* she would say as she let herself in. Once, as a toddler, early in the morning when we thought he was sleeping, my son, Carlos, climbed out of his bedroom window and made his way to Señora Rosa's kitchen for a tortilla and a cup of tea. He was no dummy. He knew where things were good.

Señora Rosa's kitchen is unusually cozy, despite the fact that it is rather cramped and dark and has an uneven cement and dirt floor. When it rains, several pots are set up on the table to catch the rain that leaks in through the corrugated tile roof. There is only room to sit down at the table or to stand at the stove. If anybody wants to get up from the side of the table that is close to the wall, everybody who is sitting on the bench on that side must get up first to let that person out. When you sit down you expect to stay awhile. The kitchen used to be a bit larger, until her son expanded on his room next door to create a kitchen for his wife. It is a bit more modern, with a refrigerator as well as a stove, though Raquel too must take her dishes to the sink in the back yard to wash.

***"Donde come uno, comen dos."* ["Where there is enough for one to eat, there is enough for two."]**

> *"'Donde come uno, comen dos; y donde comen dos comen cuatro.' Aunque una tortilla, pero comen. Es un antiguo dicho que nos decía mi papá."*
>
> ["'Where there is enough for one to eat, there is enough for two; and if there is enough for two, there is food for four.' Even if only one tortilla, but they eat. That is an old saying my father used to tell us."]

It is impossible to come to Señora Rosa's house without receiving an invitation to share a *taquito*. Or a *tamalito*. Whatever was cooked for the day or brought over by a neighbor or Doña Josefina from that day's fiesta or *nueve días*. Some *mole*, *frijolitos adobados*, a *mixiote*. And always, some *nopales*. Señora Rosa goes out of her way to make everybody happy in her kitchen. When she makes *nopales* in salad, she keeps some without cilantro for me; when my kids are coming, she makes them her tortitas de papas or milanesas that they love, or sends me home with some (Figure 89).

Always, there is a huge pile of tortillas—four or five kilos—and a bowl or two of salsa or, at the very least, a jar of canned jalapeños, and a bowl of salt. And lots of conversation, or rather, little chance for conversation amidst her endless stories, including her many tales from her previous life as a hairdresser and a school janitor. From this kitchen you hear her views of life, men, power and corruption, and the dignity of being poor. *"Somos pobres pero honrados* [we are poor but honorable]" is one of her many favorite sayings. Señora Rosa enjoys

telling her stories and none of the people present ever dare interrupt, no matter what. The kitchen is her space. When you sit at her table, you listen to her.

***Tortitas de papa* [Potato patties]**

> *"Se toma como un kilo de papas, cuatro huevos, dos cucharadas soperas de harina, 1/8 de kilo de queso rallado, sal y aceite. Se cocen las papas en agua con tantita sal para que no se partan. Se machacan bien. Se revuelve con queso y sal. Se bate la clara del huevo. Luego se le ponen dos cucharadas soperas de harina a las yemas y se sigue batiendo. Se capean y se fríen."*
>
> ["You take about one kilo of potato, four eggs, two soupspoons of flour, 1/8 of a kilo of grated white cheese, salt, and oil. You boil the potatoes in water with a little salt so they will not break up. You mash them thoroughly. You mix them well with cheese and salt. You beat the egg whites. Then you add the two spoonfuls of flour to the egg yolks and keep beating them. You coat the potato patties in this and fry them."]

Figure 89: Señora Rosa making *tortitas de papa* [potato patties]

***La abuela en casa* [The grandmother at home]**

Beatríz recalls the long walks to the market accompanying her grandmother.[117] Long, mostly because la *abuelita Cleotilde* walked so slowly. As the youngest child, born after her mother was

[117] Structured interview on February 11, 2001.

working full time outside the house, Beatríz was pretty much raised by her grandmother. She fondly remembers helping *la abuelita* prepare food in the patio: how she taught her to wash, trim, and ring out the *romeritos* they would buy from a local vendor at the market or that somebody brought them. Today, she says, she feels tremendous pleasure helping her mother in the kitchen, doing those same things her grandmother taught her[118]. And she loves it when Señora Rosa tells her she does something just like *la abuelita* Cleotilde. Or when her brother Camilo tells her she should have been named Cleotilde.

Conversation with the compadre[119]

Señora Rosa's kitchen is a propitious place for conversation with any one of her many guests from her family and network. Sitting at her table after sharing a meal, at the conclusion of his regular Sunday visit, her *compadre* Benjamín invites me to join his co-workers and associates as they prepare the meal for the upcoming feast they host in honor of the *Virgen de Xaltocán* (See February 26, 2001 entry, *Hoy cocinan los hombres,* in Chapter Four). Like many native Xochimilcas, he has great pride in the town's traditions and loves to discuss them. Today he is anxious to share his perspectives on changes: "*Ya el callejón cambió, ya hay mucha gente extraña* [The *callejón* Bodoquepa has changed, there are many outside people here now]." He says the neighborhood, like all of Xochimilco is now full of people from the states—Jalisco, Michoacán and

[118] At age 30, Beatríz is a young woman who finds the kitchen a welcoming place and would enjoy spending more time there, though her mother allows her only a peripheral role.
[119] February 22, 2001.

others—whom he says came to Mexico City in search of "work and progress". They ended up here instead, many of them working as day laborers on the chinampas. Yet, despite the changes which he enumerates for me and discusses in detail, he insists, like everybody else with whom I speak, that Xochimilco's traditions will go on forever. He uses the examples of the *Virgen de Xaltocán* and the Niñopa to illustrate his point.

Don Benjamín's chief complaint is that people are no longer treated equally in the barrio. At fiestas, everybody is no longer served the same way, and not all are invited to participate. He is offended that at a recent fiesta of which his niece was *mayordoma*, he did not receive one of the formal, printed invitations.[120] Alcohol is another example, he says. Now, some people are served a glass, while others are given an entire bottle to share with for their group of friends and family at the table. This is something new. The inequality with which people are treated is also evident in the *itacate*: not only are there distinctions from person to person, but whereas before when you left a party you were given huge quantities to take home, liters and kilos, the last fiesta he attended he was given an *itacate* so small—"*apenas para taparse la muela"*—it was barely enough to fill your molar.[121] This reflects the social stratification that has always been part of the traditional fiestas, but it is at least in part related to the increasing number of

[120] Written invitations are not required to attend most traditional fiestas in Xochimilco, though the hosts always distribute a certain number of them to people they consider their most important guests, serving as an opportunity to show patronage. While often invitations are beautifully hand-made and saved as a souvenirs or *recuerdos*, in the case of the Niñopa, the invitations often include a photograph and prayer and become a relic of sorts.

[121] Benjamín felt slighted by many aspects of the treatment he received at his niece's fiesta, beginning with the lack of a personalized invitation and ending with the very small and ungenerous amount of food he was given to take home.

people attending. The *compadre* says it used to be, only thirty people or so came to a fiesta, whereas now you can expect a thousand or more. This is a change that generates a sense of pride in the growing prestige and recognition of local traditions on one hand, but at the same time creates new social tensions as hosts struggle to keep the number of participants manageable, and to attend to them in the traditional manner without offending anyone. This is impossible of course, and necessarily leads people to redraw the lines around their community networks and associations amidst a constant redefinition of "outsiders." This is particularly complicated because the more recent wave of immigration to this area is not the first, and in fact many of the barrio's greatest defenders of tradition are precisely those who arrived from outside the Federal District in the last fifty years.[122] To complicate things even further, not only are there too many people in Xochimilco, the *compadre* says, but many of them invite guests from Mexico City. The volume of people at the fiestas also means that most people buy disposable dishes and cups made of paper, plastic and Styrofoam now, he complains. Before, they pooled together with neighbors and family members to come up with enough clay plates and mugs for a celebration.

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[122] A case in point is Antonio's grandfather, an Otomí from Estado de México, who along with his wife, is *mayordomo* of the Niñopa for the year beginning February 2, 2001. The sacristán of the neighborhood chapel pointed out this phenomenon to me, of newcomers being among the staunchest defenders of the barrio's traditions. I had already observed the same thing in Ocotepec and Tetecala, where relative newcomers and "outsiders" are key to maintaining and energizing local traditions in food celebrations. I would venture that while an array of factors contribute to this, in many cases, this type of participation helps develop a tentative space of legitimacy for newcomers within their adopted community, at the same time as it helps them maintain a link to their more rural and indigenous roots where food offerings and annual celebrations of saints and other holy images are a key part of their "Catholic" faith and agricultural calendar. It is certainly a piece of the puzzle in understanding attachment to place through food celebrations and the persistence of rural traditions in increasingly urban peripheries such as Ocotepec and Xochimilco.

Another relatively new development is that pulque is disappearing among the young. In only the last ten years, the *compadre* says, five pulquerías closed in the immediate vicinity of the neighborhood alone, between the *plaza de la Asunción* and the centro about four blocks away: *El Barzón, Mi cuate, El viejo Amor, La Chinampa,* and *El Acocote*[123]. But that is not the only change. Before, people tell me, pulque was of excellent quality: you gave it to a new mother and within three days "*tenía más leche que una vaca suisa"* ["She had more milk than a Swiss cow"]. Whereas before, the pulque was always white, now it came *cured* in many flavors, such as tomato, celery, lemon with salt, oats with cinnamon, pineapple, alfalfa, and even Nescafé.

Finally, Don Benjamín complains that the chinampas are changing: *"Ya no se dan las flores y las verduras en las chinampas,"* ["The flowers and vegetables no longer produce on the chinampas like they used to."] The comment is followed by the typical complaint about food tasting like chemicals now and the exaggerated observation that with the help of hormones, electricity and chemicals, *"luego los pollos crecen en tres días!"* ["chickens are raised in three days now"]. Like most people here, he blames the loss of the chinampas' role in everyday life in part on the overuse of pesticides in recent years. But he brings up is another factor, that young Xochimilcas for the most part now choose to become professionals—especially doctors and teachers[124], and have abandoned the

[123] The names of pulquería establishments, recent history in most cases, are worthy of study in and of themselves.

[124] Señora Rosa tells me that one of her superiors at the school where she worked for years told her that Xochimilco produces so many teachers that you would be hard-pressed to find a public school in the entire Federal District (including and surrounding Mexico City) that did not have at least one teacher from Xochimilco. In fact, many of the middle-aged women I interviewed in the *callejón* were teachers; it appears that here—despite the lack of professional opportunities for

chinampas.[125] His own case in point, the *compadre* was the first in his family to leave agriculture behind as a way of life. He says he did not want to be a *campesino* like his father and grandfather, that as a child he hated getting up before dawn and working past dark in the damp every day, to help his family just barely scrape by. At age ten he quit the fields and went to work in a *telar* or weaving establishment in town, working to make the shawls that still dominate the gendered landscape today. He worked from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. for sixty pesos a week, buying his first pair of shoes that year, half a century ago.

He tells his children, one of whom is a lawyer, that they have it easy these days: *"Ahora que nacieron ustedes ya estaba la mesa puesta!"* ["When you were born, the table was already set!"]

The visit[126]

Mass was at noon and I arrived at the *callejón* Bodoquepa a few minutes late. I did not mind missing the Mass; the important thing was the meal that followed. I was here to celebrate the baptism of Señora Rosa's grandson, Roberto, with her family by participating in the meal after the Mass (Figure 90).

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women in general—as in many places around the world, education is one area of work considered appropriate for women.

[125] Despite the fact that many Xochimilcas no longer work in agriculture because of what they consider better opportunities, the loss of the traditional landscape and way of life associated with the chinampas is very much a painful topic of discussion. It is also important to note that while not most, many locals do maintain a traditional lifestyle though they have had to adjust to a changing market, often benefiting from the growth of Mexico City at the same time as they are hurt by the globalization of local markets. In some cases in the *callejón*, young generations are returning to the land their grandfathers worked but which their fathers abandoned, and approach their work with a combination of traditional knowledge and modern technology.

[126] Saturday, April 28, 2001.

Figure 90: Proud parents with baby in baptism gown

I could see it was a major day as soon as Señora Rosa opened her blue wooden door. She looked gorgeous! Primmed for a very special occasion, she had on her pearl earrings, and her hair—longish, gray, curly with a fresh perm—was combed neatly behind her ears, held in place with some kind of goo. She went back to combing it in the mirror in the hallway when I stepped in and I went on to marvel at her new outfit, especially her fancy, shiny, blue heels! She assured me that she used to wear heels every day and was perfectly comfortable in them until she broke her ankle. Now she wore them only on special occasions. These had been a gift from el *compadre* Benjamín, together with the cloth for her dress from la *comadre* Marcela that her sister Josefina sewed for this event.

I remember the night she broke her ankle. It was after midnight and she was in the house-lot garden cleaning a big pile of fresh chicken to cook with *mole* for a fiesta the next day. She tripped on the black hose that still brings water to her

utility sink alongside the canal; her ankle swelled up horribly. All night long, I drove her from one government clinic to another, outraged at the lack of attention and bureaucratic runaround. That was about ten years ago and her ankle—which had never healed right—still hurt.

La *comadre* Marcela was sitting in her usual spot by the plants just outside the kitchen. Her wheelchair folded up against the wall, she sat in a wicker chair in the sun, happy to be in her madrina's loving care and company, though impatient to get to the fiesta early on. Señora Rosa chuckled as she told me el *compadre* was glad to be rid of her and she was glad to have her, so it was a great arrangement and everybody was happy. Unlike herself, *"a la comadre le encantan las fiestas!"* ["The *comadre* loves fiestas!"] And Señora Rosa had company for this one fiesta that she could not get out of. She had insisted that I join her as well, reminding me of the date on several occasions over the previous months.

When I walked to the end of the hallway to greet the *comadre* Marcela, I stuck my head in the kitchen and peeked into the pots on the stove, expecting the big meal to be served here. I was surprised to find only a frying pan with *rajas con papas con cebolla* [strips of poblano peppers with potatoes and onion], a couple of whole, baby *nopales*, and a clay pot full of *mole con pipián*. There was a bowl of fresh, raw green salsa on the table, sitting next to a basket with five kilos of warm tortillas.

Eventually, Señora Rosa offered me a taquito. Seeing so little in the pan, and knowing by now that we were going to go to her daughter Rosita's for la

comida, I tried to resist, arguing that there would be nothing left for Camilo's *almuerzo* if I ate what was in the pan. Señora Rosa assured me that *nopales* were the last thing Camilo wanted, that she had tried to give him *nopales* yesterday but he had refused to eat them. *"Ya le dije como es Camilo con los nopales"* ["I have already told you how Camilo is with *nopales*"], she reminds me. Camilo is very picky about all his food, but in particular, he got so fed up with having had *nopales* served to him nearly every day by his Aunt Josefina when his mother worked as a janitor and concierge at a local elementary school for twenty-five years, that he avoids them every time he can. *Nopales* are one of the most common and inexpensive everyday dishes in Xochimilco; they are available every day of the year at the market and the local plaza, freshly cut from nearby fields. So I downed the *nopales*, and the rajas con papas with the fresh green salsa on a couple of tortillas. Señora Rosa joined me at the table, serving herself the *mole* with *pipián*, a type of squash in this case.

While we ate, Señora Josefina finished bathing in the outdoor shower, then got dressed and joined us, her long black hair in a funny knot on her head. Señora Rosa jumped up to resume her role as cook, asking Josefina what she wanted for brunch, de *almuerzo.* "*Un huevito,"* was the reply, and apparently it really meant two eggs, not one. It was interesting how Señora Rosa had fully taken over the kitchen as soon as she retired, re-establishing control over the household from that strategic site. Señora Josefina sat down and began chopping half an onion and a bunch of cilantro into very fine bits, and then mixed it in a bit of the salsa at the table on what became her plate. She sliced a leftover roll—

telera—from the previous night in two. When the egg was ready, she received it from her sister on her bread and smothered it with her salsa. She finished her special salsa with a couple of tortillas after her *torta* had disappeared.

Today, amidst Señora Rosa's usual barrage of stories based on her quarter century interacting with school administrators, parents, children, and the assorted visitors (including would-be kidnappers, policemen, drug addicts and the like) that showed up at the school door which she was responsible for guarding, Josefina's only comment is that no man is to be trusted. They are all bad, by definition, apparently. She tells a story of her own about a *compadre* who thought that she had told his wife about his lover. She had not told her, she says, even though she had seen him with the woman one night. Instead, it was his own best friend who had told the man's wife. The day he found out about his friend's disloyalty—when his wife ran him out of the house—he went and told his best-friend's own wife about that man's girlfriend—that she lived in the nearby town of Tepepan and apparently had two of his children. Both men were thrown out of their houses by their wives the same day, and the two never spoke to each other again. The ex-friend did not even come to her *compadre*'s funeral, she said. But I did not tell, Josefina says. *"Yo como la indita, que vió pero no contó"* ["I, like the little Indian woman, who saw but did not tell"].

Señora Rosa concentrates on stories about school, unfaithful husbands, and women's self-respect, retelling stories I have heard several times over the years. This time I decide to pay close attention and notice that their common theme is about the weak or poor confronting authority–always portrayed as stupid

or corrupt or both—and about loyalty or betrayal. She is proud of her loyalty and service to her bosses, and of the respect for her work and herself that she earned. She finally quit before her retirement when she felt she had put up with an unpleasant *directora* for long enough.

What strikes me about the stories today is the general rancor and infighting throughout the neighborhood and in families. Today there are stories about *pleitos* [disputes] in the family or between in-laws—beginning with the fact that Antonio's parents had refused to provide a pig for the baptism we are celebrating today. They changed their mind and said "no" just a couple of days ago, so they had had to make *mixiotes de pollo* instead. With *nopales* and *arroz* and *frijoles* of course. Señora Rosa told me that Antonio's father was jealous and angry that his son was buying things for himself rather than helping his parents with the costs of the Niñopa this year. He had bought a refrigerator that now sat in Señora Rosa's kitchen and a TV that was in the bedroom she shares with Antonio and Beatríz and the two babies. Both were bought on credit, to be paid in installments like just about everything people buy in the *callejón.* Both would be returned not long afterwards, when Antonio would lose his job driving a neighbor's taxi.

The other neighborhood and family quarrel discussed today was brought on by the death of Pilar's (Josefina's only daughter) husband's grandmother, also from the *callejón*. Apparently the five children, all adults with adult children, could not agree on how to share the costs of her burial. There was bitter fighting because the offspring argued that she had unequally divided her estate, though

Señora Rosa stressed that they had all gotten some land. *"¡Qué falta de respeto!"* ["What a lack of respect!"] Señora Rosa is appalled. She says her mother had nothing to give when she died—the house she lives in now was from her father's family, but that of course there was never any question of not giving her the appropriate funeral and wake! This gossip in kitchenspace is important because it is key to understanding the basic issues that are upsetting to people here today. Señora Rosa insists that family fighting over land is as old as Xochimilco.

Before we leave for the party, and because I have convinced Camilo to join us—even though he hates family gatherings—Señora Rosa does a funny thing. She had saved a couple of tacos for Camilo on a plate. Now she puts them in the new refrigerator, then, thinking better of it, pulls them out. *"Acá se enfrían mucho"* ["They will get too cold here"], she says, and takes them to a shelf in Josefina's room that has been functioning as a fridge for too many years to stop doing so now. It is the coolest room in the house, she says, and the cats can not get to the food there.

Gendered spaces

Spaces. Kitchens are women's domain. Men sit down to be fed, eat, leave their dishes on the table, and go out to the street to drink and talk. Inside a home, kitchens are not community spaces. It is here that women assert control over their world. The kitchen is one of the few places where men listen to women. And so, women tell their stories. Over and over, to each other, to their children, perhaps to themselves. Kitchenspace, including the spillover into the house-lot garden.

Kitchenspace is womens' space, or, more specifically, women's territory. Many women I spoke to were happy in this space, felt at home, in control. Señora Rosa was so relieved to finally get back to her kitchen after nearly thirty years of a salaried job outside, that she moved in and made it clear to all that it was her kitchen. Nobody can cook there but her, as several of her now adult children—some living at home—complained to me. Jesús skipped this hurdle by building his wife a kitchen right next to his mother's. Thus another one of Señora Rosa's favorite refrains: *"Juntos pero no revueltos"* ["Together but not all mixed up"].

Señora Rosa is proud of the boundaries that keep each woman in her own kitchen and allows her daughter-in-law and son some autonomy and privacy in a crowded house. This reduces some of the infamous tension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law that reaches new levels in this crowded and intermarried neighborhood with so much history—and sometimes bad blood—in common. Here, in a small space, Señora Rosa granted her son the space his wife needed to raise their family. While she, the grandmother, carried the babies in her rebozo and fed them and bathed them many a day, only rarely did Jesús come to his mother's kitchen to borrow salsa or tortillas. The kitchen boundaries were so clear that Señora Rosa did not use Raquel's refrigerator or telephone, even though she did not have either herself.

So important is the influence of the mother-in-law in the kitchen that Beatríz, Señora Rosa's youngest daughter, preferred to have her young family share a bedroom with her mother than to live in her in-laws' house in their own, private room. There, she would have to eat in her husband's mother's kitchen,

which she does not wish to do. Señora Rosa is proud of the boundaries, as she is of the clear victory she has scored keeping Beatríz, Antonio, and their two small children in her house. The message is clear: we might be poor but we are proper and we know how to manage household politics: women's spatial politics in the kitchen.

***"Gracias a Dios"* ["Thanks to God"]**

In Xochimilco, among older people in particular, there is tremendous reverence towards food that surrounds its consumption as well as its preparation. Whether regarding the more sacred and symbolic tamales or tortillas, or the basic quelites or cauliflowers that are part of everyday meals as well, food is always treated with respect. This is reflected in many kitchen sayings to the tune of: *"Hoy comemos, mañana veremos"* ["Today we eat, tomorrow we'll see"]. In a context of ongoing economic uncertainty and the deterioration of the local environment, Señora Rosa and other women, with whom I have been sharing food preparation, meals and conversations, trust in God to provide tomorrow's meals.

"*Gracias*," I always say to Señora Rosa after I finish eating at her table. *"Gracias a Dios"* ["Thanks to God"], is the inevitable response, the same she repeats to the many children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, *comadres* and *compadre*s that eat at her table every week. Nobody who is hungry is turned away. When they have eaten, one after the other, they get up from the long benches on either side of the table, and as they pass her place at the head of the table—not sitting, but standing at the stove—they say "*gracias*," many kissing her

hand as they do so. One after the other receives the same response: *"Gracias a Dios."*

Señora Cande

> *"No cualquier persona da sus recetas. Muchas personas son egoistas. Tengo una cuñada que hace un pollo al naranja con arroz amarillo. Me meto en la cocina y le digo: 'comadre, ¿no me da la receta?' Y comadre nada, y no le saco la receta."*
>
> ["Not just anybody will share their recipes. Many people are selfish. I have a sister-in-law that makes chicken with orange that she serves with yellow rice. I go into her kitchen and ask her: 'Comadre, will not you give me the recipe?' But comadre nothing; I can not get her to give me the recipe."]

Doña Cande is an old acquaintance and neighbor whose daughter Alicia was a friend years ago when I lived in the neighborhood. She is the only woman of her age that spoke to me in the informal register. She was always kind, and generous about explaining details of how to cook things. Now, she shares secrets which she insists her own family and *comadres* refuse to share with her. Even the baker in the barrio refused to teach her his recipes, she tells me, though she offered to pay for a course!

Cande loves to cook, though she prides herself on not being limited by tradition. She scorns the antiquated cooking traditions in Xochimilco and prides herself on having educated her family to move beyond that. At age fifty-six, Cande considers herself a modern and innovative woman. She loves to obtain and experiment with new recipes from television programs and magazines, as well as from other women, when they are willing to share them.

Yet, she still has a set of cultural boundaries that sets limits on the degree and type of experimentation allowed in terms of menus and recipes. She tells me

that once she was asked to rate a posole that her in-laws made in the nearby town of Ajusco. She could not give it more than a six because it had herbs—hierbas de olor. *"Es que el posole no va con hierbas de olor, no es bueno,"* she exclaims.["Posole does not go with herbs. That is not good."]

El "quehacer" de la mujer [Women's work][127]

> *"Son puras carreras! Tengo mucho quehacer. Ahora los pobres pajaritos los quiero sacar al sol. Soy lenta y pierdo mucho tiempo. Todos los días es apúrate, apúrate. Ya a darles de comer, ya a recoger a la nieta, ya vete al mandado, a cocinar, a lavar, a barrer, ya otra vez a darles de comer, ya vete a vender, luego otra vez a cobrar.[128] Son puras carreras. Luego tengo que ayudar a mis esposo y siento que pierdo tiempo y nunca voy a acabar mi quehacer."*
>
> ["It is always a rush. I have so much to do. Right now I want to take these poor birds out in the sun. I am slow and I lose so much time. Every day it is hurry up, hurry up! Now feed them, now go pick up the granddaughter, now go buy groceries, go cook, wash, sweep, and then feed them again, now go sell, then go collect. It is always a rush. Then I have to help my husband and I feel like I lose time and that I will never finish my chores."]

Access[129]

I walk to the very end of the *callejón* to visit la Señora Cande. She answers the door looking exhausted, perspiring heavily. Her apron is on, her hands are dirty. It is 10:30 a.m. and like Señora Rosa, her days start early in the morning and usually end after midnight. We chat for thirty minutes at her gate.

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[127]"Quehacer" is a contraction in Mexico, meaning something very close to "housework." While the phrase "*tengo mucho que hacer"* can mean "I have a lot to do," when a woman says it in a traditional community like Xochimilco, she is generally referring to the noun, "el quehacer."
[128] She sells lingerie and silver from catalogs door to door with friends and neighbors.
[129] Journal entry November 13, 2000.

This is a bad time to talk, as she is sweeping her patio, getting ready to make today's meal. She is not going to the market today. One of her daughters brought her fresh groceries as she often does. Señora Cande takes care of her granddaughter, joining the procession of mothers and grandmothers walking out of the *callejón* at the same time several times a day to pick up children at the nearby elementary school. She says to come another day a little later, preferably after the mid-day meal. Sundays are best.

Cande invites me to join her family for a special Mass for the Niñopa this Saturday; her other daughter's in-laws will have him for the day and will be hosting a meal. I will not miss the opportunity—I hear they will be killing nine pigs and serving *carnitas* with *nopales* in the street—but I will keep trying to find a time to speak with this woman when she is willing to give me some time out of her busy schedule and multiple family commitments. Small windows of opportunity do arise, though it seems the most fruitful interactions occur when we meet at the evening rosaries for the Niñopa at Antonio's family's house. There, we always have a moment to exchange a few words as we stand in line to kiss the infant or to collect our cup of *atole* and ration of bread.

One day, I call from Cuernavaca to try to set up a time to interview her. She is out, her husband tells me, but should be back in a short time. She went for the milk at one of the dairy stables in the *callejón* and is surely chatting with a comadre: *"Nomás fue por la leche pero seguro que está comadreando."*

El callejón Bodoquepa

"I have lived in the *callejón* Bodoquepa for thirty years, but I am from the barrio of San Juan.[130] I love my house in the back of the *callejón*. I have a garden; I live at the edge of the canal; I have animals and birds; I live surrounded by dairy stables, pigs and chickens. This is a beautiful, quiet place. I like it because early in the morning I can hear the birds singing. And you hear the people going out to the chinampas.[131] No cars can get in here [the alleys are too narrow] and the air is clean. There is a lot of security and tranquility despite all the new people that have come now. And the water from the faucet is clean—in other neighborhoods it smells bad. Here you can drink it without boiling it. The canals are polluted though—throughout Xochimilco."

"Para mi en lo personal, la naturaleza es algo tan bonito—no todos tienen la dicha de disfrutarla, vivirla. No a todas las personas le gusta tampoco. Yo tenía una inquilina que no le gustaba. Yo, será que era de campo, pues desde chica venía de la escuela y le pedía a mi abuelo que me llevara a las chinampas y me tiraba de panza y metía las manos en el agua, veía los peces de la canoa. Cuando mis hijas eran chicas, los domingos pedíamos una canoa prestada y mi mamá nos llevaba, ella remaba, a buscar una chinampa. Para mi es bonito la naturaleza."

["For me personally, nature is something so beautiful—not everyone is lucky enough to enjoy it, to live it. Not everybody likes it either. I had a tenant who did not like it. Maybe it is because I am from the *campo* (country), but ever since I was little I would come home from school and ask my grandfather to take me to the chinampas. And I would flop down on my belly and put my hands in the water and see the fish from the canoe. When my daughters were little, we used to borrow a canoe, and my mother would take us—she rowed—to look for a chinampa.[132] I think nature is a beautiful thing" (Figure 91).]

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[130] The barrio de San Juan is a five-minute walk away, but like every other barrio, has a distinct personality and is considered by locals to be very much a different place.

[131] She lives by the barrio *embarcadero* where people leave their canoes that they use in the morning to get to work on the chinampas. It is also used by people who live on chinampas to leave their canoes when they come to shore.

[132] In fact, rowing is the wrong word, as the canoes used in the canals by Xochimilcas are moved by pushing off from the bottom of the canal floor with a long pole, or *poling*.

Figure 91: The author on a *canoa* in the Xochimilco canals

"Ya no es lo mismo. El agua está contaminada y no se siembra igual. La gente ya tiene trabajo y vive mejor, pues el campo no siempre da tan buena cosecha: se inunda, se hela, y uno se queda esperando. Pero los cambios en las chinampas no afectan la comida porque no solo comes de aquí, si no de lo que traen. De Cuautla traen jitomate, y de los estados, de Puebla, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes. Ahora vas a la central de abastos y encuentras todo lo que antes aquí se daba. Como por ejemplo antes se daba el salsifí que es como camote. Eso lo hay allá."

["Things are not the same anymore. The water is polluted and you can not plant the same way. People have jobs now and live better, since the *campo* does not always provide a good harvest—it floods or freezes and one is left waiting. But the changes in the chinampas do not affect the food because we do not only eat from here, but from what they bring. They bring tomatoes from Cuautla, and from the states: Puebla, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes. Now you can go to the central market in Mexico City and find what we used to grow here. *Salsifí,* for example, which is like a sweet potato. You can find that there."]

Place, family and food traditions

"Mi abuelito nos cocinaba, pues mi abuelita era comerciante, vendía verdura en Jamaica. Aquí acostumbraban que el hombre cultivaba y la mujer vendía afuera. Se llevaba el chiquihuite–como una canasta grande para llevar verduras al mercado. Antes mi abuelito llevaba a mi abuelita en canoa toda la noche para llegar al mercado—y luego regresaba al campo a trabajar. Estaba duro. Luego cuando llegó la góndola, un tren descubierto, la íbamos a esperar y a llevarle su comida, pues ella llegaba con hambre y luego pasaba primero al mercado de Xochimilco a comprar

lo que le faltaba para completar lo que cultivaba el abuelo, para llevar la mañana siguiente a vender."

["My grandfather used to cook for us, as my grandmother was a vendor in the Jamaica market in the city.[133] Here, the custom was that the man worked the land and the woman was an outside vendor. She would take the *chiquihuite*, like a big basket, full of vegetables to sell (Figure 92). Before, my grandfather took my grandmother in canoe all night to sell at the market, then he would return home to work the *campo*. It was tough. Later, when the *gondola* came (an uncovered train), we would go wait for her and take her food, because she was hungry when she arrived, and she had to first go to the Xochimilco market to buy whatever the grandfather did not grow, to take it to sell the next day."]

Figure 92: *Nopales* in *chiquihuite* at the market in Xochimilco

"Era muy bonita la vida de Xochimilco hace muchos años. Usábamos carbón y molcajete. Guisábamos tomate con carne de puerco, con verdolagas o calabazas. Ese guisado nos enseñó mi abuelo a hacer a mi y a mi hermana, pues mi abuela vendía. Mi abuelita nos compraba carne de res—hacía un caldito con jitomate, cebolla, cilantro y chilacayotes. Hay dos tipos de calabaza ¿sabes?—la redonda en la milpa en tiempo de elote y la larguita normal que se vende más. El chilacayote solo se da en tiempo de lluvia—julio y agosto. Ahorita con el frío se hela y se acaba."

["Life was beautiful here years ago. We used charcoal and *molcajete*. We cooked tomatoes with pork meat, with *verdolagas* or squash. That is the stew my grandfather taught me and my sister how to make, since my grandmother was a vendor. My grandfather would buy beef, and make a soup with tomato, onion, cilantro, and

[133] Señora Cande was one of several women of approximately her age (56) who told me they were raised by a campesino grandfather who taught them to cook, because the parents worked and the grandmother sold vegetables at the market.

chilacayotes.[134] There are two types of squash, you know. The round one that grows in the milpa at the time of the *elote* (sweet corn) and the long one that sells more. The chilacayote only comes out in rainy season—July and August. Now with the cold it freezes and dies."]

"Mi tía y mi mamá eran maestras. A mi tía siempre le gustó vivir y comer bien. Nos enseñó a comer cosas como paella y camarón. El chiste es que te las ingenias para no comer siempre lo mismo. Servimos brócoli o chayotes gratinados por ejemplo—eso no se acostumbra aquí. Siempre la comida va con sopa seca o de pasta. En esta casa no habrá frijoles siempre, pero sopa siempre sí. La sopa puede ser de verduras, con un guacal de pollo para dar sabor. Eso depende de como acostumbras a tus hijos. Nosotros de niños siempre hacíamos sopa."

["My aunt and my mother were teachers. My aunt always liked to live and eat well. She taught us how to eat things like *paella* and shrimp. The trick is you have to be ingenious to find a way not to always eat the same thing. We serve broccoli or chayotes gratiné for instance. That is not customary here. The meal always includes dry soup or pasta soup.[135] We do not have beans every day in this house, but soup, yes. The soup can be vegetable, cooked with a chicken back for flavor. That all depends on how you accustom your children. As children, we always made soup."]

"Las costumbres en la comida son diferentes. Depende de la posición económica de la gente. Hay gente que le gusta comer bien. Otra gente tiene las costumbres de los antepasados—no comen mucha carne. Come más bien habitas y así. No hacen comidas nuevas que enseñan en la televisión. Una señora que conozco hace de comer puras verduras—hace quintoniles por ejemplo. No hace cambios diferentes, sigue las tradiciones. Yo no: las cambio. Acá en Xochimilco se acostumbra usar manteca, aunque la compren en el mercado. Nosotros no, nosotros usamos aceite. Y eso que tengo una cuñada en el callejón que cría marranos."[136]

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[134] Yet another type of squash.

[135] Again, *sopa seca o sopa aguada*, [dry or wet soup] in this region refers to the dish served before the main dish and which is usually either rice, pasta, or consommé, whether with broth or "dry," with or without cream.

[136] When I ask her to introduce me to her sister-in-law, she refuses, saying that people here do not lend themselves to interviews: *Aquí la gente no se presta para una entrevista*.

["There are different food customs; it depends on people's economic position.[137] There are people who like to eat well. Others have the customs of their ancestors—they eat very little meat. They eat more fava beans and things like that. They do not cook new things that the television shows. One woman I know, for instance, cooks only vegetables—such as *quintoniles*. She does not like new changes, she keeps the traditions. Not me: I change them. Here in Xochimilco, people use lard, even if they buy it at the market.[138] Not us, we use oil, even though I have a sister-in-law who raises pigs." [139]]

"Aquí en Xochimilco se acostumbran los romeritos para la comida de Navidad. No hacen cena para Navidad. Se come pescado frito o tortas de papa. Se hace vigilia. Muy poca gente hace lomo o bacalao. Ni hacen cena, ni flan o un pay de queso. Pero nosotros aquí en casa inventamos."

["Here in Xochimilco, people are used to serving *romeritos* for Christmas. They do not make a dinner. They eat fried fish or potato patties. They observe abstinence from meat. Very few people make salted cod or pork loin. They do not even make dinner, or a *flan*, or a cheese pie. But in this house, we invent things."]

Cande tells me there are different food traditions even from one barrio to another in Xochimilco. When her sister was widowed, Cande suggested that the family prepare *pepitas de chile* as is customary in the *barrio de la Asunción.* "¡Q*ue se enojan todos los vecinos de San Juan!"* ["And the neighbors from San Juan got very upset!"][140] When her husband's grandparents died in the nearby town of Tepepan, Cande told her in-laws that they should not cook meat for the wake as that showed a lack of respect for the dead; they laughed at her.

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[137]There are several changes in food and drink preferences that are associated with status and often linked to income and education. These include shifts from pulque to brandy, lard to vegetable oil, beans or vegetables to meat, and corn to wheat.

[138] As opposed to obtaining if from your own pigs or buying it from neighbor after a fiesta.

[139]She finds the lack of Christmas dinner traditions boring and unfortunate, scorns the lack of celebration, and prides herself on being more modern and innovative in the kitchen.

[140] Pepitas de chile is a favorite dish in some places but considered insufficient or low-status in others, in comparison to mole for instance. Certainly it is a low-budget recipe, made with chile seeds and veins that have been saved for later use when the chiles themselves are used for other dishes.

***Sazón y recetas* [Seasoning and recipes]**

> *"La comida es una satisfacción—cocinarla y comerla. Porque hay que saberla hacer. Una comadre mía que guisa riquísimo no dice como. Hace un encacahuatado riquísimo y no se cómo lo hace—no sé si es con chile ancho o guajillo. Ella miente, dice que es con una cosa y no es. Un arroz amarillo muy bueno que hace dice que es por la mantequilla. Pero no es cierto. Es una tontería, pues de todas formas depende de tu sazón. Sazón es la forma de cocinar. Por ejemplo, haciendo frijoles, tienes que acitronar la cebolla. O haciendo la sopa de pasta hay que dejar que se dore bien la pasta y luego que se fría el jitomate—siempre mueve y mueve—le dejas hervir bien al jitomate antes de ponerle el agua si no sabe a crudo."*
>
> ["Food is satisfaction—both cooking it and eating it. Because you have to know how to make it. One of my *comadres* that cooks very well will not say how she does it. She makes a delicious dish in peanut sauce, and I do not know if she uses *ancho* or *guajillo* chili. She lies; she says it is one thing and it is not. She makes a great yellow rice, and she says it is because of the butter, but it is not true. It is silly really, because it really depends on your *sazón*.[141] *Sazón* is how you cook. For instance, when making beans, you have to sauté the onion just right. Or when making soup with pasta, you have to let the pasta brown just right and then fry the tomato a bit—always stirring and stirring—you have to let the tomato cook well before adding water or it tastes raw."]

The definition of the word *sazón* is literally *seasoning,* but in fact it means much more. It seems to be key to understanding the role of kitchens, women, and people's attachment to place through food. I explored my informant's views of the meaning of the word after the men who were cooking for the *Virgen de Xaltocán* justified their need for women to cook the rice for their meal with the simple and apparently self-evident affirmation that *only women have sazón*.

[141]She thinks it is silly for someone to not share a recipe because in any case, the recipe itself is not enough, and your *sazón* is not transferable.

Cande tells me that *sazón* is simply the way one cooks to give food the right flavor.

> *"No vas a encontrar diferencias entre mi y mis hijas en la forma de cocinar. A mi me llaman mis hijas y hasta mi hijo a preguntarme como se hace alguna comida, que qué estoy haciendo para comer y cómo se hace. Aparte de la receta, claro que cada quien tiene su sazón…no es igual. Pero la gente no quiere compartir recetas!"*
>
> ["You will not find any differences between my cooking and my daughters'. They call me, as does my son, to ask me how to make a certain dish, or to ask me what I am cooking and how to do it. Aside from the recipe, of course, each person has their own *sazón*…it is not the same. But people do not want to share their recipes!"]

Cande says even when people say they will show you a recipe, they find a way to get rid of you before putting in the final secret ingredient. Sharing several of her recipes, Cande refers to a *secret* ingredient that I did not discover until I paid closer attention to kitchenspace this year and indeed found that all of my informants used: *tequesquite*.

> *"Aquí se hace lo que se llama frijoles lavados, los lavas, los coces con manteca o aceite y cebolla, y luego algunos lo lavan antes de apachurrarlos y freirlos y otros no. Pero para que se cozan rápido hay un secreto que nadie va a decir, que es que se le puede poner un poco de tequesquite con los frijoles a cocer. Unos después los guisan sin lavar, otros lavados, pero cambia el sabor. También para hacer el mole, se tiene que quemar el aceite primero."*
>
> ["We make something here called 'washed beans', you wash them and cook them with lard or oil and onion, and then some wash them before mashing them and refrying them, and others do not. But in order for them to cook quickly there is a secret that nobody will tell, and it is that you add a little *tequesquite* to the beans to boil them. Some then cook them (season) without washing them; others wash them, but the flavor changes. For *mole*, one secret is you have to burn the oil first."]

"Para hacer las pepitas de chile, se llevan al molino ajonjolí, clavo, pimienta, canela, ajo y chile ancho. Se muelen juntos y se sazona en aceite o manteca, según lo que acostumbra. Se le pone agua, no caldo."

["To make *pepitas de chile*, you take the seeds to the mill along with sesame seeds, cloves, peppercorn, cinnamon, garlic, and *ancho* chili. You grind them together and then season this with oil or lard, whatever your custom. You add water, not broth."]

"El encacahuatado se sirve para una fiesta cualquiera, como un cumpleaños o un nueve días (al cumplir). Se le quita la semilla al chile seco (chile ancho) porque es otro sabor. La semilla se aparta igual que las venas para usar en otra comida. Se tuesta el cacahuate (dorándolo en aceite o manteca), se le pone chile ancho entero, ajo, clavo, pimientas, canela, y se le pone cuatro tortillas doradas para 1/4 de kilo de cacahuate, y cebolla. Se lleva al molino a moler. Se sazona y se le añade caldo de pollo. Queda muy rico con carne de puerco, mejor todavía si es espinazo."

["A dish in peanut sauce is good for any fiesta, such as a birthday or a ninth day (at the end of the nine days of funeral ceremonies). You take the seeds out of the dried chili (*ancho* chili) because it gives a different flavor. You save the seeds and the veins both to use in a different dish. Then you toast the peanuts in oil or lard, you add the ancho chili whole, garlic, clove, peppercorns, cinnamon, and four toasted tortillas for each quarter kilo of peanut, and onion. You take this to the mill to grind. Then you season it and add chicken broth. It is very good with pork meat, especially the backbone*."*]

"El almendrado se hace igual pero con almendras en lugar de cacahuate. Y se hace con pollo, y con un poco de jitomate. [Almond dishes are prepared the same way but with almonds instead of peanuts, and with a little bit of tomato.]"

Doña Margarita, la *abuelita*[142]

"Aquí me quieren mucho; me llaman por venir a hacer el arroz."

["They love me a lot here. They call me to come make the rice."]

La maestra Ofelia Lozano invited me to her fiesta months ago, insisting that I write it on my calendar so as not to forget. My son Juan, the *mole* connoisseur, also encouraged me, as he had been at a birthday party at her place recently and raved for days about the delicious *mole* served. Ever since retiring as a schoolteacher, Ofelia had been celebrating the day of the *Virgen del Carmen* with due pomp and circumstance: formal invitations, *mole*, music, and even poetry declaring the virtues of Xochimilco. A painting of the Virgin dating to 1664 that has been in Ofelia's family for five generations was brought out into the house-lot garden for the fiesta. But the most important item in her possession is the title to the land on which we celebrate, dating to 1864, framed, and hanging on the wall inside the house. The land has been in her family for seven generations, Ofelia tells me proudly. In fact, her grandmother was born just across the canal in what became my house fifteen years ago.

While the fiesta is attended by family, neighbors, and special guests including poets, young dancers, singers, and a priest—all from Xochimilco—I am primarily interested in the eighty-two year old woman who sits solemnly in the smoke kitchen at the back of the house-lot garden, watching over the huge pots of *mole*, rice and tamales. Juana Margarita González, better known as *tía Margarita*,

[142] Because this entire interview was recorded on tape (July 16, 2001), the first person selections here so accurately reflect a way of speaking that is so Xochimilco I can almost taste it. I chose to leave repetitions and idioms as is for this reason, though the translation excludes them and interprets their meaning.

or *la abuelita del puente*[143] [the *abuelita* from the bridge], is the expert that was called in to make the rice, and to ensure that the meal was up to everybody's expectations. It is by far the best *mole*, rice and bean tamales I have ever tasted.

I spend several hours sitting by tía Margarita and the multiple hearths in the back of the house-lot garden. She stirs the *mole* and checks on the rice and tamales now and then, but most of the work is over. The younger women who helped her cook are running around dealing with last minute details. As guests arrive, most of them walk back to the smoke kitchen to greet the *abuelita* with respect and affection before sitting down at the tables that have been set up in the yard. Besides her reputation as an excellent cook, this woman seems to be related by blood, marriage or kinship to nearly everybody who joins the party.

Sitting in the smoke of the burning firewood, Doña Margarita is at first suspicious, but soon relaxes and seems happy for company and conversation. She shares her memories, becoming nostalgic and tearful as she tells stories about the changes she has lived through, and the people and food that she has loved. Beginning with a discussion of chilies, *"picosísimos, sabrosotes"* ["very spicy, very tasty"], as is often the case in such an outdoor kitchen setting, our talk includes intimate details such as recipes and sex.

The in-depth interview was facilitated by the fact that I was a special guest of Ofelia's and that I arrived with Señora Rosa's family. It also helped that I have a history in the neighborhood and Doña Margarita has recollection of my family.

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[143] El puente is the small bridge one must cross shortly after the entrance to the *callejón*. Doña Margarita, her daughter and grandchildren live at the house just after the bridge. At the entrance to their property, they always have a little booth where the young women are always selling tomatoes and other vegetables that their brothers grow on the chinampas, fresh chicken they raise in their yard, and different homemade foods such as *flan* in the evenings.

It was a golden opportunity to get the perspective of a representative of the older generation of *cocineras* that compose the *retaguardia* in the kitchen, without whom food traditions and fiestas in Xochimilco could not take place.

"Nosotros en Xochimilco estamos acostumbrados a las fiestecitas, *nuestro arroz, frijoles y nuestros tamales"* ["We in Xochimilco are accustomed to our little fiestas; our rice, our beans, and our tamales"], she begins.

Los tamales

> *"Para los tamales de carne, de masa, se pone a hervir el maíz con cal, se saca, se lava, se lleva al molino, y sale polvito. Eso se bate con manteca, y con su Royal. Antes su usaba tantito tequesquite, que era salitre de la tierra. Porque ahora se le echa el Royal, el carbonato, que yo creo que ya es químico, no? Eso es lo químico. Se lleva el tomate, y hervido el tomate, se le echa sus cominitos, y ya. El cominito se muele con los chiles verdes. Y cuando ya esta batido en la masa, se agarra una cucharada con la que comemos. Una cucharada de masa se le echa a la hoja. Y se le echa el chilito, ya molido. El tomate, con cominos, con el chile y el tomate. Le echa usted en la hoja, y luego se enrreda así."*
>
> ["For meat tamales, with corn dough, you put the corn on to boil with lime, you wash it, take it to the mill, and you end up with a powder. You beat that with lard, and Royal (baking powder). Before, we used to use a bit of *tequesquite*, which is salt of the earth. But now we use Royal, which is carbonate and I think is a chemical, isn't it? Then you use tomato, cooked, and cumin, and that is it. You grind the cumin with the green chilies. And when the dough is all beaten, you take a spoon like the one we eat with. One spoonful of dough in the husk. And you add chili, already ground. Tomato, with cumin, with chili and tomato. You put it in the husk and then wrap it like this"(Figure 93).]

Figure 93: Making pork tamales with green salsa

"El que quiere le pone orejitas, el que no, nomás se agarra un montoncito de sal, se hace una crucecita. Es la creencia. No es igual que las orejas. Por ejemplo el que puso el tamal, si es bote grande, pero grande, se le amarra una orejita del mismo tamal. Pura creencia, que porque viene un niño llorando, o por algo así. La sal es para lo mismo. Eso es para el tamal de carne. El tamal de frijol, ese sí se enoja. Porque se deshace toda la masa, se bate. El tamal de frijol es muy delicado. El tamal de carne todavía se puede componer. Y el de frijol quien sabe porque no."

["Whoever wants to can tie ears on the handles, and if not, just take a handful of salt, and make the sign of the cross. That is the belief. It is not the same as the ears. For example, whoever set out the pot, if it is a large pot, has to tie a strip of cornhusk from the same tamales. Just a belief, in case a child comes by crying, or something like that. Salt is for the same thing. That is for meat tamales. Now bean tamales, they really get angry. The dough just falls apart, it mashes up. Bean tamales are very delicate. Meat tamales can be fixed, but not bean tamales. Who knows why."]

***"Antes comíamos puro maíz."*[144] ["We used to eat pure corn."]**

"Antes comíamos puro maíz. Maíz bueno, frijol bueno que nace aquí. Pero lo que comíamos hace como, como cincuenta años, todavía se cultiva aquí pero ya no tiene el mismo sabor…La tierra es buena, y se dan unos elotes buenotes, unas maizitas bonitas,[145] sabroso. El frijol, todo lo que se sembraba. Ahora ya ni sabor tiene. Ni el frijol, ni el may, no tiene sabor. Todo, todo. Sí se come, porque es de comerse. Pero el sabor de antes, pues no. Pues yo con los años que tengo! Tengo 82 años. Me casé

[144] Doña Margarita pronounces corn differently than most, with an accent on the "a."
[145] Her use of the feminine in *unas maizitas bonitas* is interesting and not standard.

en 1940; me casé de veinte años; por eso digo que yo se, y ya no tiene sabor."

["We used to eat pure (only) corn. Good corn, good beans born here. But what we used to eat about fifty years ago, while we still grow it, it no longer has the same taste. The earth is good, and it gives good corn, pretty corn, tasty. Beans too. Everything we used to plant. But now it has no taste. Not the corn, not the beans have any taste. Everything, everything. We eat it, because it is for eating. But the taste it used to have is gone. I should know, with the years I have! I am eighty-two. I got married in 1940, and I was twenty then. That is why I say that I know, and it no longer has any taste."]

"El sabor de la tortilla tampoco ya no es igual! Sabe…aunque lo pongan de nixtamal. Lo hacen a mano. Bueno lo hacemos en maquinita. Lo pone usted al comal, y al voltearse, se le quiebra. Ya no es igual. Está como pellejoso."

["The taste of the tortilla is not the same either! Even if it is from *nixtamal*. Made by hand. Well, we make it with the little machine (tortilla press). You put it on the comal, and when you go to turn it, it breaks. It is not the same; it is like all flaky."]

"Se llevaron el agua."[146] **["They took the water."]**

"Pues ya no cultivan como antes. Porque, como hubo un tiempo que se secó aquí Xochimilco. Se llevaron el agua—la ciudad metió las tuberías para llevarse el agua y los hombres que trabajaban aquí sus tierras pasaron a abandonar sus tierras. Se los llevaron. Se fueron a trabajar a México y se acostumbraron ahí. 'Tráigame el dinero,' pues ya. Porque nuestra agua no nos falta, porque nosotros teníamos manantiales y de esos manantiales les damos y tenemos. Y tenemos nosotros, y a nosotros no nos debe faltar agua porque tenemos nuestros manantiales."

146 "They took the water." It is impossible to speak about Xochimilco to most locals over the age of about 30 without them referring to the transcendental event that provoked a series of traumatic changes in the community: when Mexico City took their water, only to return some of it as wastewater years later, after the campesinos had become salaried workers and no longer wanted to work the land.

["They do not sow like they used to. Because, there was a time that Xochimilco dried up. They took the water—the city put pipes in to take the water, and the men who worked the land went and abandoned their land. They took them. They went to work in Mexico (City) and became accustomed to it there. 'Bring me the money,' well, that's it. Because we never ran short on water, we had springs and from those springs we had enough to give and to still have some. And we have our water, and we should never run out of water because we have our springs."]

***"Nosotros, que somos pobres."* ["We who are poor."]**

"De diario estamos acostumbrado a tomar nuestro tesito de canela, tesito de hierbabuena, tesito de manzanilla, tesito de una hierbita que se ve en el agua, se llamaba amozote. Algún día pregunta con cualquiera, y le dicen cual es el amozote. Es de los canales—a la orilla de las chinampas. Los que tenían dinero tomaban café. El que no, pues no tomaba café. El que tenía dinero tomaba leche. Y ahora, pues como ya está CONASUPO, pues ya tenemos leche. Y de ese, atole de maíz—que para los niños es bueno. Blanco o de canela. Sencillo. Un atole también lo hacen pero con chile, chileatole. De almuerzo si sobra un arrozito, al otro día el arrozito se calienta, se come el arrozito, se sirven los frijoles. Si sobra molito, se refríe el mole—todo lo que sobró del otro día se calienta. Si sobra, eso se almuerza, y si no, pues hace usted pues unos chilaquiles, con un caldito de pollo, lo que haya. O un taco: va al mercado, trae chicharrón, aguacate. Queso, aguacate. De comer, un caldito, el entomatado de tomate o jitomate con carne de puerco."

["For every day, we are used to drinking our cinnamon tea, or spearmint tea. Chamomile, or tea from a plant that you find in the water called *amozote*. Just ask anyone one day and they will tell you which one is *amozote*. It is from the canals, right at the edge of the chinampas. The people with money drank coffee. Those that did not, well, we did not drink coffee. The ones with money drank milk. And now, well, since we have CONASUPO,[147] we have milk. And from that, we make corn *atole*. White or cinnamon. Plain. There is another *atole* they make, but with chili, called *chileatole*. For lunch (brunch), if there was rice left over from the day

[147] She is referring to the governmental subsidized milk program for low-income families. Every morning, a truck comes to the mouth of the *callejón* and people line up with their plastic buckets to receive the day's ration of milk.

before, you heat it up, you eat it, you serve beans. If there is *mole* left over, you refry the *mole*—everything left over from the day before you reheat. It there are leftovers, that is what you have, otherwise, you make *chilaquiles*, with a bit of chicken broth or whatever there is. Or a taco: you go to the market, you bring pork rind, avocado, cheese. For the main meal, you make a soup, pork meat in tomato (green or red).”]

***“El mole de aquí”* [“Mole from here”]**

“En cada lugar es distinto. Aquí el mole lo trabajamos—antes con mis abuelitos— el típico mole de acá lo hacían con pura pasilla. Del dulce. Es lo que le decíamos, “pasillo del dulce”, pero no era dulce. El otro pasillo sí pica. Y también se trabaja con eso y se puede hacer el mole. Ya usan el que quiera, ya ahora como quien dice ya es cosa de decente. Unos ya no quieren comer el pasilla. Lo hacen de mulato. Ya es otra generación que ya cambiaron. Creen que es más sabroso, y sí es sabroso, el mulato. Pero no es como el pasilla. Y se da más cómodo, más barato. Ahora el mulato está más barato que el pasilla.”

[“Every place is different. Here we work *mole*—before, with my grandparents—the typical *mole* here used to be pure *pasilla* chili. The sweet kind. That is what we used to call it, “sweet pasilla”, but it was not sweet. The other *pasilla* is hot. You can work with that too and also make *mole*. Now they use whatever they want…some do not want to eat *pasilla* anymore. They use *mulato* chili. It is another generation now and they have changed. They think it is tastier. And it is tasty, the *mulato.* But its not like the *pasilla*. And it is cheaper, they give it at more comfortable prices. The *mulato* chili is cheaper than *pasilla* now.”]

“A los olores: se le echa ajonjolí, se echa chocolate. Sí, el que se le echaba más era el chocolate amargo. Antes, era un chocolate que ahora casi no llega (de Oaxaca). Se miran así, unas barritas delgaditas, como un librito. Se echaba para su mole chocolate amargo, pero amargo. Yo le echaba de Ybarra. Se le echa chocolate, se le echa ajonjolí. Se le echa nuez, se le echa almendras. Ah, también se le echa pasas. Se le echa –el que le alcanza se le echa almendras. El que nó, nomás con pura nuez y el cacahuate. Pero yo ya no le pongo cacahuate porque hace daño. Se le echa un plátano: por un kilo de mole, un plátano macho.”

["For the *olores* of the *mole* you use sesame, you use chocolate. Yes, it used to be we used the bitter chocolate, a chocolate that we almost never get around here anymore (from Oaxaca). They look like this: skinny little bars, like a little book. You used chocolate for *mole*, but bitter chocolate. I used Ybarra brand chocolate. You add chocolate and sesame. You add walnuts, almonds. If not, just walnuts and peanuts. But I do not use peanuts because it makes people sick. You add one banana: for one kilo of *mole*, one plantain."]

"Se le echaba—bueno yo ya no le echo nada de eso—se le echaba, cáscara de naranja. Se le echaba cáscara de la naranja: se dejaba orear y luego cuando ya estaba seco, lo doraba usted. Se ponían cuatro tortillas en un kilo. Se le echaba, pasas. Se le echaba pan—de bolillo, de bolillo rebanadito. Bolillo del fresco, nomás se oreaba y se doraba como la tortilla. En manteca. Nosotros siempre trabajamos con manteca. Ahora ya es distinto."

["We used to use—well, I do not use any of that any more—we used to use orange rind. You would let it dry and then you would brown it. And four tortillas for one kilo. You add raisins. And bread. Rolls, cut into slices. Fresh rolls, but you let them dry and browned it like the tortillas. In lard. We always used lard. Now it is different."]

El entomatado

"El entomatado se come mucho aquí. Se hierve el tomate con el chile verde. Verde. El tomate, no el jitomate. Porque el rojo es jitomate, y el verde es tomate. Si es para siete personas, ocho, un kilo de jitomate. O kilo y medio. Si saben comer mucho, porque a veces repiten, se ponen dos kilos, o kilo y medio. Se hierve el tomate, se pone el agua a calentar, y ya que está caliente se le pone el tomate. Si no se desbarata. Y le echa sus chilitos, aunque hierva, no se le desbarata. Si quiere picoso, siquiera unos diez chiles. Del verde, aunque sea de árbol, si quiere picosito. Entonces ya lo deja enfriar. Si tiene licuadora, lo muele en licuadora. Yo los pongo, les echo el agua y sal, cebolla, y su ajito. El agua fría fría. Entonces lo echo a la licuadora. Tomate, chile verde, y se le pone calabazita. Cuando ya lo guisó, la carne se coce. Y cuando está cocido, le calcula[148], se pone en la

[148] "Le calculo" is almost always part of a recipe, replacing specific quantities of ingredients or time.

cazuelita, le echa su manteca, o aceite, y echa la carne, y lo deja así que se este friendo y luego lo voltea y ya cuando ve que está cascarudita la carnita, lo voltea, y lo deja freír el otro lado, y cuando ya está doradito, le echa el chilito. Lo deja otro poco que se sazone. El chilito con la carne. Se sazona. Y el caldito que le sobró de la carne, se lo pone. Pero le pone ajo, eh, al chilito. Con ajo. Y su cebolla. Y ya, lo echa al chilito. Y ya, lo deja que se sazone, y le echa el caldito. Y ya le echa las calabacitas. Hasta entonces, hasta que ya esté suavecita la calabazita y ya está rico."

["The *entomatado* (in tomato) is something we eat a lot here. You boil the tomato with green chili. The green one, the *tomate*, not the *jitomate* that is red. If it is for seven people or eight, use one kilo of tomato. A kilo and a half. If they know how to eat, because sometimes they want seconds, you use two kilos, or two and a half. You boil the *tomates*, put water on to boil and when it is hot, you add the *tomate*. Otherwise it falls apart. And you add its chilies, and even if it boils, it will not fall apart. If you want it hot, at least ten chilies. Green ones (serrano), or *de árbol* even, if you want it hot. Then you let it cool. If you have a blender, blend it there. I do that, I add water and salt, onion, and garlic. Cold, cold water. *Tomate,* green chili, and you add squash. When that is cooked, the meat cooks. And when it is ready, I calculate it. You put lard or oil in the pan, and fry the meat until it is well fried on one side, and then the other. Then you put it in the chili, and leave it there awhile until it seasons, the chili and the meat. And the broth from cooking the meat too. But you add garlic to the chili. With garlic and onion. And you let it simmer. Then you add the squash. Then, when the squash is soft it is good."]

"Y en jitomate es igual como eso, nomás que con jitomate le echa usted papitas. Con cerdo o con pollo, como usted quiera. Pero si es jitomate es con papita. Y si es pasilla con carne de puerco, se le echa sus nopalitos, papitas, y carne de puerco. Y cebolla y su ajo que no le falte. A los tres guisados se le pone ajo y cebolla. Chimapaxtle le decían los abuelitos al de pasilla. Y a veces los abuelitos hacían con su manita así, batían el de pasilla, y lo que sobraba, lo que ya no podían lo echaban al molcajete y lo molían en el molcajete. Y ya martajadito se lo echaban al guisado y qué rico. Sabía diferente que con licuadora. Da una cosa rica. Pero ahora eso ya no se hace."

["With *jitomate* it is the same thing, except with *jitomate* you use potatoes. With pork or chicken, as you like. But if it is *jitomate,* it is with potatoes. And if it is with *pasilla* chili with pork, you add nopales, potatoes, and pork. And do not forget the onion and garlic. *Chimapaxtle* is what the

grandparents called *pasilla* chili. And the grandparents did it like this, they beat it with their hand, and what was left over and they could not beat, they put it in the *molcajete* and ground it there. And just a little bit ground, they put it in the stew and it was delicious. It tasted different than with a blender. It gives something delicious. But we do not do that anymore."]

***"La cena: nomás a veces un antojito."* ["Dinner: well, just a snack at times."]**

"Bueno a ver. Pues aquí no se acostumbra la cena. A veces, porque no estamos acostumbrados. Ahora sí, si no falta la leche, pues que el pan, que los bizcochos. Para ahora esta época. Pero cuando nosotros, con un tamalito de elote. Tenían un comalito mis abuelitos, hacían atole, y nos daban una gordita con manteca, que sacaban del comal. Y tómate tu atolito—no cenábamos. Y no merendábamos, como dicen ahora. Ahora se merienda. Lo que es atole, los tamales. No decíamos que era merienda, era un antojito. Pero antes de dormir. A veces. No era siempre. No cenábamos. No más a veces un antojito. Las personas que tenían más centavitos, pues sí lo hacían, pero las personas que no, no. No tomaban eso."

["Well, let's see. We did not accustom dinner here. Sometimes, but not because we were accustomed. Now we are. If there is no milk, there is bread, or cookies. But this is a different time. But when it was us, maybe a little tamal of sweet corn. My grandparents had a little *comalito*, and they would make *atole*, and give us a *gordita* with lard that they took out of the comal. And, have your *atole*. We did not have dinner. And we did not have *merienda* as they say now. Now people have a *merienda*. *Atole* and tamales. We did not call it a *merienda*, just an *antojito* sometimes. People with more money, they did, but not us. We did not have that."]

***El doctor* [The doctor]**

"Teníamos un doctor, cuando tuve a mis muchachos, y me decía: 'Mujer, no comas tamales, porque te pones gorda y tus niños nacen grandotes. Come más poquito.' 'Ay, doctor, si yo tengo hambre!' yo le decía. 'Pues no comas mucho.' Y yo de por sí he estado gorda. 'No, no comas mucho porque te engordan los tamales.' Eso de que 'van a nacer sus bolas de tamales'—eso decía el doctor. Eso decía el doctor. Cuando veía a mis

hijitos ya tan grandotes, gorditos, 'ya ves, tus hijos están gordos.' 'Doctor están sanos, están buenos. No les falta nada a mis hijos. Están buenos.'"

["We had a doctor, when I had my kids, and he would tell me: 'Woman, do not eat tamales because you get fat and your children are born too big. Eat less.' 'Oh, doctor, but I am hungry!' I would tell him. 'Well, do not eat too much.' And I was always fat. 'Do not eat too much because tamales make you gain weight.' That is what the doctor would say. When he would see my kids so big and fat,[149] 'You see, your kids are fat.' 'Doctor, they are healthy, they are good. My children are not lacking for anything. They are good.'"]

***Hombres y tierras* [Men and land]**

"Bueno, y usted vive ahí? Era usted la mamá de los gueritos? Y su esposo? Bien chaparro el. Y 'hora? Y usted aquí vive? Usted era la guera que vivía con el? Sí, verdad? Ahora la vi, 'yo a usted la conozco.' Y ahora que la vi, digo: 'esta muchacha la conozco, la conozco.'"

["Well, and you live here? Are you the mother of the blondies? And your husband? Real short he is. And now? You living here now? You were the blondie that was living with him? You are, aren't you? Now that I saw you, 'I know you'. And now that I saw you, I said: 'I know that young woman, I know her.'"]

"Y ahora? Se fue con otra? Estos hombres—de veras. Qué le busca a una a la otra? Que perdió con una que no podía tener con otra? Y no lo ve usted desde que se fue con la otra? Y si viene con usted, ya no le hace el amor? Ah yo dijera, yo si mi esposo me hubiera dejado por otra, yo sí lo recibía. Del cariño que le tuve. Sí, pues. Son hombres. Así no era antes."

["And now what? He left with another? These men—really! What is he looking for in one and another? What did he lose with one that he could not lose with another? And if he comes to you, does he not make love to you anymore? Oh, I would say, if my husband left me for another, I would receive him. That is for the love that I had for him. Yes, well. They are men. It was not like that before."]

[149] Doña Margarita's words referring to a large size all have positive connotation, in direct contrast to the negative connotation in the Doctor's usage.

"Yo me casé en 1940. Mi esposo, es familia del doctor Leonardo Navarro. Es de acá. Ahora quién sabe como está Leonardo. Mi esposo lo pierdo a los treinta años de casada—falleció. Mis hijos los pasó a dejar casados los tres. Pero yo decía, no fue marido, fue un tesoro para mí. En los treinta años, hasta ahora, le lloro. Se iba a trabajar, porque tenía dos turnos, trabajaba acá en Plaza, en el Palacio Nacional. Era un hombre bueno: yo no lo comparo con nadie. Cuando lo perdí, lloraba día y noche. Y, pero lo busqué, para que se de usted una idea: lloraba en el panteón y le llamaba su nombre."

["I got married in 1940. My husband is family of Doctor Leonardo Navarro[150] He is from here. Who knows where he is now. I lose my husband after thirty years of marriage—he died. He left all my three children married already. But I said, he was not a husband, he was a treasure for me. [151] In the thirty years until today, I still cry for him. He would go to work, because he had two shifts; he worked here in Plaza, in the National Palace. He was a good man; I do not compare him with anybody. When I lost him, I cried day and night. And I looked for him, so you get an idea: I cried for him in the cemetery and would call his name."]

"Pero cuando vivía, él me decía: 'anda tonta, gózalo que al día me vas a perder. Vamos a pasear!' 'Y tus hijos,' yo le decía. 'Déjalos ahí con mi mamá! Vámonos a pasear!' 'Tendríamos que venir a ver a nuestros hijos.' 'Vámonos!' Nos íbamos, los dejábamos con mi suegra, y ya veníamos[152]. Y mis hijos, ya estaban grandecitos. 'Ay, dónde se fueron a pasear? Nos dejaron!' 'Qué? Les faltaba algo?' decía el papá.' 'Qué te falta? Qué tienes?' El veía por todo. Trabajaba dos turnos."

["But when he lived, he would tell me: 'Come on dummy, enjoy it now, because any day you will lose me. Let's go out!' 'And your children?' I would ask him. 'Leave them with my mother; let's go out!' 'But we'd have to come and take care of our children.' 'Let's go!' We would go and leave them with my mother-in-law. And we'd come back. And my kids, they were getting big by now. 'Hey, where did you go out? You left us!' 'What? Were you lacking anything?' their father would ask them. 'What do you need? What is wrong?' He took care of everything. He worked two shifts."]

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[150] The man who sold my husband the house 15 years ago and with whom Doña Margarita associates me.

[151] She gets very sentimental and cries as she recalls her husband.

[152] Referring to the common farewell: "Ya venimos."

"Antes, trabajó las tierras, pero le digo que vino la seca, y se fue, y ya no se regresó. Sembraba margarita, sembraba mucha flor, que ahora ya ni quien venda. Ni quien siembra esas flores. Ya nadie de ahorita, nadien siembra esa flor. Esteres, estátiles, margaritones, chícharo de flor. Todo eso sembraba. Se acabó. Porque las tierras ya están vacías. Que ya no hay quien la siembre. Están vacías."

["Before, he worked the land. But as I said, the dry period came and he left the land and never returned to it. He planted many flowers that are not even sold anymore. Nobody even plants them anymore. Nobody nowadays, nobody plants those flowers: *esteres, estátiles, margaritones, chícharo de flor.* All that he planted. But that is finished now. The lands are empty now. There is nobody to plant them now. They are empty."]

"Nuestras chinampas ahora las trabajan mis nietos. De mi hija la mayora. Porque su papá era chinampero. También ya se murió mi yerno."

["My grandsons work our chinampas now.[153] The offspring of my oldest daughter. Because their dad was *chinampero.* He died already too."]

Las tradiciones en la comida **[Food traditions]**

"Bueno la verdad, no ha cambiado. Los abuelitos comían en este caso, el pescado criollo que le decían—el pescado criollo con tomate. Pescado con tomate, en salsa de tomate, pero que le llaman miximole. Bueno, nosotros. Porque de Xochimilco a San Gregorio, ahí le dicen mixmole. O sea, pero es el mismo platillo. Es con cilantro, y pescado. El tlapique es otro, es cocido a vapor, por medio de hoja de maíz. Con epazote, tomate y cebolla. Y con frijoles negros. Pero hervidos aparte, o con caldo de habas con chilacayotes. Y cilantro. Y eso no ha cambiado, casi la mayoría lo come, es común. Pero el miximole se aplica al pescado, ranas, ajolotes, y acocil. Pero no a todos, a uno de esos."

["Well, in fact, food traditions have not changed. The grandfathers ate, in this case, criollo fish we called it—criollo fish with *tomate*. Fish with *tomate*, in *tomate* sauce, but that we call *miximole*. Well, we do. Because from Xochimilco to San Gregorio, we call it *miximole*. It is the same dish, with cilantro and fish. *Tlapique* is something else, it is fish cooked by

[153]Doña Margarita's family is not alone in this pattern in Xochimilco today, where grandsons are returning to work their grandfather's land, which their fathers never worked.

vapor in a cornhusk. With *epazote*, *tomate*, and onion. And with black beans. But boiled separately; or with a fava soup with *chilacayotes*. And cilantro. That has not changed; just about most people eat it. It is very common. But *miximole* is (a term) used for fish, frogs, *ajolotes*, or freshwater shrimp. Not all at once, just one of those."]

"No es caldo, es un guisado, espeso. Y a todos se le puede agregar nopalitos. El que gusta nopalitos, nopalitos; el que no, no. No se tiene que servir desecho. Se tiene que servir entero el pescado. Tiene su punto. Si es un batidillo ya no es comida, es batidillo."

["It is not soup, it is a stew, thick. And all of them go well with nopales. If you like nopales, nopales; if not, not. You should not serve it fallen apart. The fish has to be in one piece. It has to be done exactly right. If it is all mushed up it is not food, it is mush."]

"También hay coatatapas, que es frijol negro molido en seco en metate. Y se coce con su propio caldo como frijoles. Y el chopamole: es jitomate picado, cebolla, calabazita, chile, ajo, carne de puerco. Sazonado. Y muchos le echan nopales o xoconostle. Con epazote. Se sigue comiendo, bueno casi la mayoría lo come. Eso es la comida rápida. Luego hay el chinmapaxtle: una salsa de pasilla con costillas o espinazo o cabeza de puerco. A esa salsa se le pone tomate verde. No mucho, unos tres, cuatro tomatitos. Y le da un sabor muy especial como agridulce. Y también se le puede echar nopalitos."

["There is also *coatatapas,* which is a dish of dry black beans ground on the *metate*. And you cook them in their own broth like beans. And *chopamole*: that is chopped tomato, onion, squash, chili, garlic, and pork meat. Seasoned (sautéed). And many put *nopales* in too or *xoconostle*.[154]With *epazote*. We still eat that, many people do. That is fast food. Then there is *chinmapaxtle:* a sauce made of *pasilla* with pork chops or backbone or head. That sauce takes green tomatoes. Not much, just three of four little tomatoes. It gives it a special sweet and sour taste. You can add *nopales* to it too."]

"El otro es el picadillo, con calabazita picada, con jitomate picado. Y granitos de elote. Y flores de calabaza. Sin carne: es calabazita, jitomate, granitos de elote, flor de calabaza—y queso."

[154] A fruit of the nopal.

["Then there is *picadillo,* with chopped squash and tomato. And kernels of corn. And squash blossoms. With no meat: its squash, tomatoes, corn kernels, and squash blossoms—and cheese."]

"Pa' los muertos y pa'los vivos."[155] **["For the dead and for the living."]**

> *"Nosotros ponemos ofrenda de muertos, pero hay personas que ya no ponen; solamente ponen un pancito, el agua. Lo mínimo es el pan y el agua. Pan, agua, y la vela. El pancito. Y nosotros no: tamales, bizcocho, plátano, naranja, su dulce, su mole, su pollo. Sus tamales, su calabaza. Sus camotes. Su copa, su cigarro. Cerillos. Y la mesota grandota!"*
>
> ["We put up an offering for the dead, but there are people who do not do that anymore; they just put out some bread and water. That is the minimum: bread and water. Bread, water, and a candle. A small bread. But not us: tamales, cookies, bananas, oranges, their sweets (squash cooked in brown sugar and cinnamon), their *mole*, their chicken. Their tamales, their squash. Their sweet potatoes. Their drink (of alcohol), their cigarette. Matches. And a big table!"]

"Deme usted un tamalito que lo pruebe esta muchacha!" ["Give me a little tamal for this young woman to taste!"] Doña Margarita tells another woman working with the final food preparation details. "*Esos son los tamales; del maíz sale eso! A ver, si le regala tantito molito. Ese es más rico con el mole*." ["These are tamales, they come from corn!"] she tells me. "But give her a little bit of *mole* too; they are better with *mole*," she tells the other woman. Then, quickly bringing her kitchen companion up to date, she adds*: "Esta muchacha vive aquí. Vive acá, es su vecina. Compró con el doctor Mencho. Nomás que dice que su marido no está, dice que ya se fue con otra mujer! Ya la dejó con sus hijos."* ["This young

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155 This story of the respect for the dead and for ancestors is one of many I heard from informants in central Mexico that seem to combine indigenous and Catholic elements. As Doña was telling this particular story, a Catholic priest in the yard was saying Mass to the partygoers, his words booming on a loudspeaker in the background juxtaposed with Doña Margarita's.

woman lives here. She lives here, she's your neighbor. She bought land with Doctor Leonardo. But she says her husband is not around, that he left with another woman. He left her with her sons!"]

Turning back to me, and to the tamal, as if there had been no interruption, she continues: "*Sí. Y así lo hacemos el molito. Con su platanito. Así lo hacemos el tamalito. Está rico, verdad? Comienza igual, nada más que les ponemos su hojita de aguacate. Va a probar otro. Así nada más.* [Yes, this is how we make *mole*. With banana. This is how we make tamales. It is good, isn't it? It starts the same, but we add a little avocado leaf. You will have to try another one. Just like that.]"

> *"Pero yo le digo, y esa ofrenda, se reparte a nuestros hijos, a nuestros compadres. Viene usted a la casa y le damos su plato, una naranja, una tortita, un plátano. Y luego le lleva usted la canasta con sus plátanos, sus naranjas, sus tortas. Lleva usted la canasta. Pa' los muertos y pa'los vivos. Tapado con una servilleta, así como lo lleva usted se lo vuelven a dar. Bueno, antes."*
>
> ["As I was saying, that offering, we distribute it among our children, among our *compadres*. You come to the house and we give you your plate: an orange, a little roll, a banana. And then you take your basket with its bananas, oranges, little rolls. You take your basket. For the dead and for the living. Covered with a napkin. Just like you brought it they give it back to you. Well, that was before."]

Chapter Nine: Kitchen Narratives, Ocotepec

Again, the articulate individuals included here differ from others in many ways. I have included them not only because they provide different perspectives, but because I believe that their particular situation or insights shed light on many other women's experiences in Ocotepec, and in my region of study. As is the case throughout my work, the journey which took me to kitchenspace is as much a part of the story as what I found there.

I begin with a closer look at Maria Theresa's kitchen, the woman who hosted the big meal for all four barrios in Ocotepec on May 3 that I described in Chapter Five. I continue with a day in the regular routine of Doña Isidra and Doña Dolores, who appeared briefly in the introduction to my sites at the very beginning of this work. Finally, I close with Maria Soledad, an unmarried woman with no children, who, like Esmeralda in Tetecala, is responsible for cooking for her family everyday.

Like most of my informants in these three communities, Maria Soledad is known primarily as a member of a family, and in particular, as her father's daughter, though she is also a well-loved teacher at the local pre-school. Because of this and her father's prominent role as a spokesperson for local traditions in Ocotepec, he is heard from as well. This, I think, provides a useful contrast between the more public voice which her father, Domingo Díaz, represents, and her equally clear voice from inside the house, as well as the gendered and generational differences in their perspectives. Maria Soledad is a classic

representative of the unsung heroines to whom I have sought to bring attention in this work. She, like all of the women in these *Kitchen Narratives*, contributes her time and energy to preparing food on a daily basis in the more private space of the home. Indeed it is her sister, Susana, and not Maria Soledad, who has achieved some public recognition for her kitchen skills in community celebrations, and who purportedly inherited the elder women of the family's special food preparation knowledges.

Whether the community kitchens in the house-lot garden which are the focus of the first three chapters of this section, or the less visible home kitchens that are more often indoors, kitchens remain at the center of cultural reproduction and at the heart of family and community relations. Some of the women I present here are fully aware of this fact, despite the lack of social recognition.

Maria Theresa

"La comida es un punto de reunión y de unión. Todos nos reunímos, comentamos, platicamos y estamos comiendo. La cocinera es muy importante en esto. Pues sin cocinera no habría comida, y no estaría tan bien preparada. Tal vez los hombres pudieran guisarse, o algo, pero como que las mujeres le ponemos nuestro toque especial. Más que nada, la cocina requiere de tiempo y calma. Porque no se puede hacer las cosas a la carrera. Pues la comida lleva mucho tiempo: quita mucho tiempo la comida."

["The meal is a point of gathering and union. We all gather, engage in discussion, talking while we eat. The cook is very important in all of this. Without the cook there would be no meals, and the food would not be so well prepared. Maybe the men could cook for themselves, or something, but it is like we women give it our special touch. Above all else, the kitchen requires time and calm. Because you can not do things in a hurry. Preparing meals takes time: food takes a lot of time."]

"Feliz y con amor sabe más rica la comida. O sea que guisa uno con más empeño vamos, con el gusto por que salga todo rico. A mí me da gusto cuando todos saborean y les gusta mi comida. Claro que para que esté rica hay que tener buen sazón, o sea que antes de agregarle el líquido a lo que estás preparando, se tiene que dejar sazonar bien. Enojada tal vez hasta a lo mejor salga buena—pues sí, porque ya tiene uno la mano—pero como que no se saborea. [No se daña?] Bueno, en los tamales y el mole, eso sí no funciona si hay bilis: los tamales no se cuezen, y el mole se agria, se corta. Ya no se lo comen."

["Food tastes better with happiness and love. I mean, you cook with more dedication, with pleasure that it will come out very tasty. I am pleased when they all savor and like my food. Of course, for it to be tasty you must have good *sazón*, that is, before adding the liquid to what you are preparing, you have to let it season well. Even if you are angry it might still come out OK—because it is like one has the touch—but it is like nobody will savor it. [It does not spoil?] Well, with tamales and *mole*, those do not come out right if there is bile: the tamales will not cook, and the *mole* sours, it curdles. They will not eat it."]

"Porque como que debe de estar la gente con gusto, todas las personas que están en la cocina. Es que se supone que comer es un placer. Entonces si hay alguien que está cocinando molesto en el hogar, pues por eso la comida resiente. Debe ser algo que se saboree. Y no que todos nos enojamos. Si no, pues, tal vez se empieze a desunir la familia."

["It is like people should be in the kitchen with pleasure, all of the people in the kitchen. Because eating is supposed to be a pleasure. So if there is somebody that is cooking all upset, then that is why the food feels that. It should be something that one savors. And not that we all become angry. Otherwise, maybe the family would become disunited."]

"Yo siempre acostumbro persignar mi comida para que alcanze y salga rica. Con la sal se persigna, y luego se le agrega. Si se le agrega carne, se persigna otra vez."

["I am used to always making the sign of the cross over my food, so that it will suffice and come out tasting good. You make the sign of the cross with the salt, and then you add it. If you add meat, you make the sign of the cross again."]

The approach

Rather symbolically, one of the two entrances to Maria Theresa's house is traditional, the other modern. The entrance closest to the center of town is through a huge gate right behind the soccer field; it is just a block from the barrio chapel and leads straight into the *abuelo's* cornfield. Entering from that side, the first thing that hits you is the smell of earth and the view of the cornfield, in whatever stage it may be at the time. The front entrance to the house is a little red gate on a new street that dead ends shortly thereafter. This side faces away from town and towards the city. A newer sector of Ocotepec, this side leads to Paseo del Conquistador in Cuernavaca about five long blocks away. As you approach this side, the first thing you see is a sign on her wall announcing that the family is

Catholic and venerates the Virgin Mary. It is aimed at Protestant groups seeking converts and begins with: *"Hermano protestante"* ["Protestant brother"].

While Maria Teresa's family is from Ocotepec, she says she was born in Cuernavaca. This is clearly separate from Ocotepec in her mind, although the place where she was born, near the once famous *Casino de la Selva,* was only recently the limits of Ocotepec lands. She recently lived in the city of Toluca with her husband and children, until her mother was ill and, as the only daughter, she came to take care of her. When the woman passed away a couple of years ago, the entire family moved back here so that they could be close to her elderly father—*el abuelo*—and he would not be left alone. In a tentative position between insider and outsider, her family's role in hosting the main meal of Ocotepec—*la comida de todos los barrios*—for May 3 presented them an opportunity to affirm their belonging and to integrate themselves more fully into the community.

Family unity and love are foremost values for Maria Teresa's family, and the theme runs through her food. When I arrived for her interview she insisted on first braiding my hair—something she loves to do—because I was wearing it down and must have struck her as in need of care. Eventually, she had to get back to washing her chicken in the stone washbasin just outside of the kitchen. As I continued her interview from my seat at her kitchen table, she moved on to making *mole* verde in a huge *cazuela de barro* that looked out of place on top of her small gas stove. While she cooks in clay pots every day, Maria Teresa also uses a microwave to heat tortillas in the final rush when everyone sits down at her table.

I am grateful to Maria Teresa for the hospitality and her support of my research. Because she has a foot in the traditions of Ocotepec and another in the outside world—like many other women her age here—I realize I can ask her things that I can not ask most older women, and that she has more perspective on local culture than somebody who has not lived elsewhere. She was willing to be my guinea pig of sorts, allowing me to tape-record our interview, and obliging my request that she draw a map of her kitchen. Before I depart on this extended visit, I ask her daughter, a second-year anthropology student at the state university, if she would be willing to help me interview the *tía* that was in charge of the food at the fiesta on May 3. Her father chuckles at the idea and says it would be impossible: *"Es que aquí son otras costumbres."* ["It is just that the customs are different here"][156]

***El abuelo y la milpa* [The abuelo and the cornfield]**

On one occasion in early June that I visit Maria Teresa's family, her father was getting ready to plant his cornfield. An altar to *San Isidro labrador*, patron saint of agriculture, complete with flowers and candles, stands behind him. A traditional, woven *morral* hangs from his shoulder, full of the sweet blue corn seed he selected from his last crop, ready to be sown. *"Con dos cuartillos de maíz siembro 1,200 metros"* ["With two cuartillos of corn, I plant 1,200 meters"], he tells me as he starts to poke a hole in the dirt with his bare toes. One side of the

[156]This response was much like Cande's in Xochimilco, when she refused to introduce me to her sister-in-law and explained that people in the barrio "do not lend themselves to that"—or Doña Josefina's early declaration that she would not cooperate with my study. People in Ocotepec, like Xochimilco, and to a lesser extent, Tetecala, are often suspicious and resentful of outsiders.

field is for blue corn, the other for white. A hired man with a pair of mules plows in the background. Don Julián Romero Avila, visibly moved, is ready to begin the ritual of planting the corn.

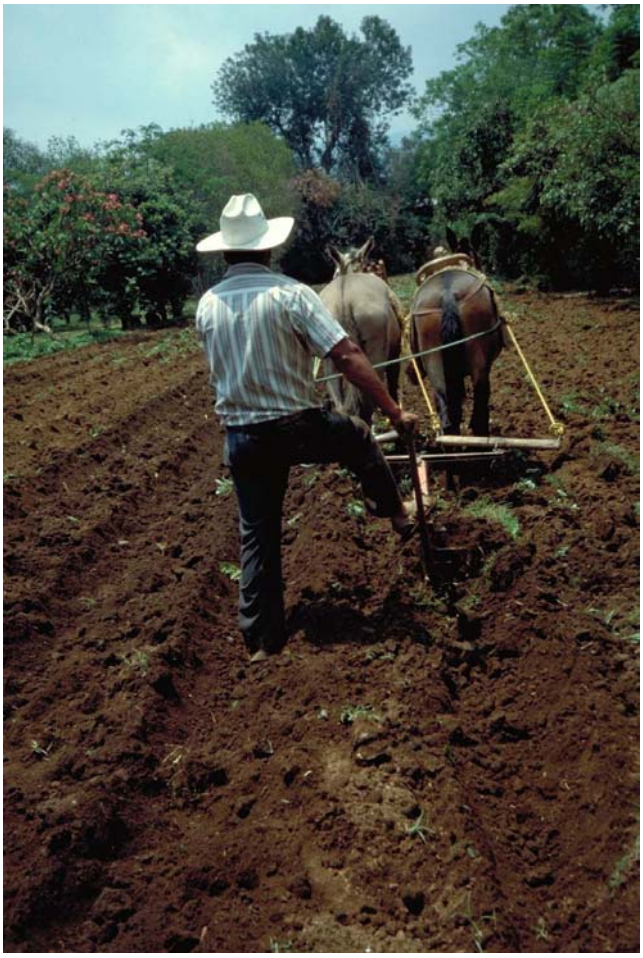

Figure 94: Plowing the fields in Ocotepec

The old man—*el abuelito*—has more land, but this is where he lives and where he plants the most now. Every year there is corn, squash, and marigold (*cempazuchitl)*. Maria Teresa has chili in the ground outside her kitchen as well, and plenty of plants in old cans and pots.

"Aquí nos huele a tierra humeda" ["It smells like damp earth here"], Maria Teresa said, describing Ocotepec (Figure 94). *"Tiene cierto aroma nuestro pueblo"* ["Our *pueblo* has a certain aroma"]. Local food has a certain flavor and aroma as well. While the city of Cuernavaca and the town have both grown so that they are coming together at the edges, one noticeable difference between them besides the cornfields—which

are fast disappearing—is the food. Not only is local food more *condimentado* or spicy, but, according to Maria Teresa, it is more filling and satisfying. *"En el centro la comida ni te satisface ni te llena*," says Maria Teresa, "*ahí está la diferencia con la modernidad"* ["Downtown, food neither satisfies not fills you; there is the difference with modernity"].

Figure 95: *El abuelo* planting corn with bare feet

Just as Don Julián begins to plant his corn, the church bells toll (Figure 95). He stops, looking up from the ground. *"Quien hubiera dicho*," he muses. ["Who would have said."] An elderly man and a woman, both friends of his, both dead the same day. Old friends pass away, a new crop of corn is in the ground. The cycle of life and death seems to hang over the newly turned earth.

Learning in the kitchen

> *"En la comida, yo les enseño a mis hijos que no deben humillar a una persona que es campesina, porque gracias a ellos tenemos qué comer."*
>
> ["At mealtimes, I teach my children that they should never humiliate a *campesino*, because it is thanks to them that we have food to eat."]

Maria Teresa learned to cook watching her mother, her aunts, and her female neighbors. She, in turn, has taught her children to cook. Her daughter knows how to make meatballs, *chilaquiles, enchiladas*, rice, *chiles rellenos*, she tells me, giving me only a partial list. Her son, she says, knows enough to survive—if only eggs with chili, and beans. He is the one who helps her with the tedious process of making *chiles rellenos*. Besides teaching her son and daughter to cook, perhaps more importantly, the kitchen is a place where she transmits her values about life in general.

Mole verde

Maria Teresa is making *mole* verde as we talk in her kitchen. She insists I stay for dinner, and on giving me the recipe so I can make it for my family later.

> "Cook the chicken pieces in broth. In a blender, mix five *tomates* (green tomatillos) and ten serrano chilies with a piece of onion, garlic, and cilantro. Then season a bit of onion in oil in a *cazuela de barro*. Add a quarter kilo of ground pumpkin seed and stir a minute so it is coated with the oil. Immediately stir in the salsa and stir non-stop until it thickens (5 minutes). Then add the pieces of chicken with a tiny bit of its broth. Serve with hot tortillas. The same person must stir and serve always, she warns me. But, she adds, the traditional *mole* verde in Ocotepec was made with pasilla chili, not green serrano chili."

Two kitchens

I notice several craft projects in the kitchen as I sit at the table, with ribbons, bits of yarn, and glue. Maria Teresa recycles most kitchen containers in the handicrafts she makes for special events: milk cartons for lanterns at Christmas, cut-off plastic soda bottles for souvenirs for *quinceañeras*. Nothing is wasted here: large cans are used for potted plants. Food scraps and old tortillas are cooked in a soup and fed to the dogs.

I ask Maria Teresa to draw a map of her kitchen for me. She hesitates, and asks. *"Cuál de las dos?"* ["Which of the two?"] *"La de diario o la cocina de humo?"* ["The one for everyday cooking? Or the smoke kitchen for fiestas."] She draws both, beginning with the one in which we are sitting. "*Traeme un lápiz—voy a hacer un experimento"* ["Bring me a pencil for an experiment"], she tells her daughter. Despite her initial reticence, she enjoys drawing the details—the flowers on the table, the ruffled curtains, the pots—signing her masterpiece when it is complete. Halfway through, she draws a line down the middle of the paper and sketches the huge clay pots for *mole* with the firewood piled up alongside (Figure 100). Every house in Ocotepec has a smoke kitchen, she insists. Knowing the huge new houses being built all around the outskirts of the town do not, I wonder if this would not be a clear indicator of a local family, versus one from Mexico City or Cuernavaca who had recently bought land and turned a cornfield into housing.

"Sin cocinera no hay nada." **["Without the cook there is nothing."]**

Maria Teresa seems surprised when I ask her what would happen if there were no women cooking. In the household, she says, it would represent a lack of love and unity. In the community, it would be chaos. Celebrations would not involve children if women were not cooking; they would be drinking affairs for men only.

> *"Pues no habría nada, porque sin cocinera no hay nada. Por ejemplo con hombres hubiera habido bebida, porque va y se compra; el vino va y se compra. Pero si no hay cocineras no hay comida."*
>
> ["There would be nothing, because without the cook there is nothing. For example, with men there would have been drinks, because you can buy alcohol, you can go to the store and buy liquor. But without women cooking there is no food."]

Doña Isidra and Doña Dolores

> *"Antes el pueblo era muy campesino, y de eso vivían, del campo. Comían o vendían. Pero ahora la juventud ya empezó a estudiar—no quiere trabajar. Además la tierra ya es para vivienda, ya somos muchos. No hay donde vivir. Casi donde quiera hay casas—y son nuevas."*
>
> ["Before the whole town lived off the land. Everyone ate and sold their products, but young people started going to school—they do not want to work. Besides, the land is for housing, there are many of us now. There is no place to live. Almost anywhere you look there are houses, and they are new."]

Noche de Muertos en Ocotepec. November 1, 2000.

At the end of October and beginning of November, the time that monarch butterflies arrive from their long migration south on tattered wings, and that the orange and gold of blooming *cempazuchitl* [marigold] covers the countryside, many communities in central Mexico await the souls that return from different spatial realms of the dead to visit their loved ones in this world.[157] In Ocotepec, people have a tradition of receiving them with altars laden with fruit, bread, tamales, *mole* and even cigarettes, pulque or other pleasures presumably denied in life after death. While the custom is not limited to this town, the conscious effort of townspeople to share their traditions with outside visitors is extraordinary, as they open their homes not only to family and friends, but to unknown guests with

[157] The geography of the pilgrimages carried out by the dead in this belief system is complex. Diffferent days of the calendar are reserved for receiving the various types of ghosts, such as children, who are received on October 31, with appropriate foods that are not too spicy and with toys on their altar. Other days are set aside for receiving the ghosts of people who died of drowning, of violent accidents, or other deaths. Each type of ghost presumably returns from a different spatial realm associated with each type of death.

whom they share food and drink after the other-worldly visitors have partaken of their essence.

Figure 96: *Cempazuchitl* and candles mark a path for returning souls

When a person died within the year, the family may set up a full-bodied altar—*de cuerpo entero*—and include a representation of the form of the deceased, complete with personal items such as a hat or shirt, and a mask. While some altars are truly lavish, all are at the very least adorned with flowers, candles, a glass of water and a special bread that is baked only at this time—the famous *pan de muertos* with crossbones and colored sugar. Often the *ofrenda* includes the ritual tamales accompanied with *mole* and the alcohol favored by the deceased.

Children's altars offer candy, toys, tiny versions of the *pan de muertos* and miniature portions of food.

Muertos provides an opportunity for meeting local people in their homes, so I visited several *ofrendas,* guided by pathways of *cempazuchitl* petals, glowing candles, and the smell of flowers and burning incense—*copal* (Figure 96). The sound of fireworks exploding everywhere and children squealing with delight made it clear that, despite the otherwise somber mood and relative silence, the occasion was truly a celebration. Everywhere, I was given a tamal, *pan de muertos* or both, and a cup of *atole*, *ponche*,[158] or black coffee. In some places, the host offered me a shot of rum for my *ponche*—"*quiere piquete?"* [Would you like it spiked?]

One home I visited was honoring the death of an elderly woman: her *rebozo* [traditional, woven shawl] was draped over the shape of a body on a long table covered with food and flowers. I was granted permission to take a few pictures and promised to return with copies.

Visiting Dolores, December 14, 2000.[159]

My visit began with a trip to Isidra's house: I wanted to give her a photograph I had taken of her mother's *ofrenda* in November. When she was absolutely sure I was not trying to sell her the picture, she finally opened her gate and let me in. I sat at the kitchen table with her for a while, the television blaring

[158] Ponche is a hot fruit punch traditionally made in the Christmas season and for wakes or days of the dead. In Ocotepec, the recipe includes guayaba, apple, sugar cane, cinnamon, raisins, and sometimes pineapple.
[159] See "Taste of the Place" in Prologue.

behind the curtain that separated that room from the rest of the house. Isidra had little time to sit and talk as she was on her way out to help a friend make tamales that day. She invited me along, arguing that her friend was better qualified to speak about Ocotepec than she was, because she herself was brought here from Puebla as a child.

"Yo sí soy de Ocotepec, desde mis abuelos" ["I *am* from Ocotepec, since my grandparents"], Dolores begins by affirming her connection to Ocotepec. Isidra's friend turns out to be more bashful about talking to a stranger than she, but the two of them together seem to feel more comfortable with me and it turns out to be a fruitful morning.

Dolores has been making tortillas and selling them on a daily basis for over fifty years, since she was a little girl. On occasion—today, for instance—she also makes tamales on request, for a special event. She is standing up behind her *comal* when we arrive, kneading her *masa* on the *molcajete* under a roofed but otherwise outdoor kitchen. Isidra sets to work finishing the green salsa to be used in the tamales, which her friend has already begun. She brings a spoonful out for Dolores to taste and approve shortly thereafter. Clearly happy to share something about which she feels some authority, she gives me a tip and a different recipe for green salsa: *A la salsa se le pone comino—no muchata, poquito. Si se le pone mucho, hace daño, si se le pone poco, ni sabe.* [Add cumin to the salsa: not too much, not too little. Too much makes people sick, too little leaves it tasteless.]

The tamales take one hour to steam, Isidra says. "You put the *tejolote* on top of them [the "hand" of the *metate*] to help the *masa* cook correctly,"—yet

another ritual meant to guard the *tamales* from evil and discord, and assure their success. "*Está viva la masa"* ["The *masa* is alive"], she says. "*Si estamos discutiendo, absorbe lo malo. El tejolote es para cualquier cosa."* ["If we argue, it absorbs the discord (the bad). The *tejolote* is just in case."]

Dolores talks about the many changes she has witnessed in Ocotepec, while continuing to make tortillas, gingerly placing them one after the other on her comal, turning them over nimbly and removing them with her fingertips at just the right moment, without burning herself. Isidra brings me a plate of salt so that I can enjoy a few right off the comal.

> *"Antes se molía aquí la masa. Ahora se lleva al molino. Se hacían tortillas en casa tres veces al día. Antes la mujer no trabajaba, trabajaba en casa. Ahora los matrimonios los dos salen a la calle a trabajar. Los jovenes comen huevos o comen en la calle—a taquear.[160]"*
>
> ["We used to grind the *masa* here. Now we take it to the mill. We made tortillas at home three times a day. Before women did not work, they worked at home. Today with married couples, both the man and the woman go out to work. The youth eat eggs or go out to the street to eat tacos."]

Despite these changes, Isidra and Dolores agree that the diet at home has not changed and still consists of the same *sopa, guisado y frijoles* [soup, stew, and beans] that their parents and grandparents ate.[161] And people still bring her their dried tortilla and food scraps for her *marranos* [pigs], Dolores says. Only now she only has one pig, she chuckles as she corrects herself and stresses the singular, *un*

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[160] Taquear here is a verb—"to taco"—implying that it is not a formal meal. *A comer*—"to eat"—often refers explicitly to *la comida*, complete with the various elements that a *comida* includes, such as *sopa seca* or *sopa aguada*, a *guisado*, etc.

[161] The phrase "sopa, guisado y frijoles" is what my informants frequently used to refer to everyday food, and seemed to reassure everyone that *everything is still the same*, regardless of all the changes they describe.

marrano. But while there used to be a large cornfield just beyond her stove in the house-lot garden, that space is now mostly under construction and has been reduced to almost nothing.

As if to conclude, Isidra interjects*: "Ahora ya nadie hace tortilla.*" ["Nobody makes tortillas anymore."] I ask Dolores: "*Y usted no está haciendo tortillas?"* ["Aren't you making tortillas?"] For many years, women in this community have survived by making tortillas, precisely because there have always been women–of the middle and upper classes—who did not. In more recent decades, however, even poor women, that are the majority in my three communities, are able to buy inexpensive, subsidized tortillas at the *tortillería*, and are happy to do so, regardless of the complaints about their quality.

"La ciudad nos está tragando." ["The city is swallowing us."]

While Dolores has adjusted to changing circumstances and purchases her corn today, she is sad and uncomfortable with the changes in land use in her immediate home and community, and with the swelling population. "*Sembré unos elotes para el antojo, para tener maíz fresco."* ["I planted a few cornstalks for the cravings, to have fresh corn."]. She says she can not live without seeing corn.

> *"No estamos bien. Ocotepec es un pueblo, pero al rato se convierte en cuidad. La ciudad nos está tragando. Hay menos cosecha y más gente."*
>
> ["We are not doing well. Ocotepec is a town, but soon it will turn into a city. The city is swallowing us. There is less harvest and more people."]
>
> *"Ya no hay campesinos. El gobierno no les quiere ayudar. El banco no perdona: exige aunque el campesino cosechó o no cosechó. Y el campesino perdió."*

> ["There are no *campesino*s left. The government does not want to help them. The bank does not forgive: it demands whether the *campesino* had a harvest or not. And the *campesino* already lost."]

When I leave, a young girl named Lucía Díaz escorts me past the furiously barking dogs that guard the entrance to the property. I ask her if she is related to Don Domingo Díaz at the other end of town. He is her uncle. Knowing of his family's respect for tradition, I ask her: "Do you make tortillas by hand?" "Yes," she responds.

Maria Soledad, la hija de Domingo Díaz

> *"Es importante el estado de ánimo en la cocina. Una vez venía muy estresada—como tenía mucho trabajo en la escuela—y se me ocurrió hacer arroz. Pues vine a hacer el arroz y todo y lo dejé dorando. Un ratito. Después se me olvidó el arroz. (Risa) Se me quemó! Como que venía así muy acelerada de la escuela y como que quería guisar rápido…que todo estuviera rápido. Pero así pasan cosas cuando una no está de humor, o cuando está enojada. Luego dice mi papa: 'Ay, estuviste enojada.' 'Por que?' 'Porque la salsa te salió picosa.'"*
>
> ["Your mood is important in the kitchen. One time I came home all stressed out—I had lots of work at school—and I decided to make rice. So I started making the rice and everything and I left it browning. Just for a minute. Well, then I forgot all about the rice! (Laughs) I burned it! It is like I was in such a hurry coming home from school that I wanted to cook something fast, I wanted everything ready quickly. But that is how things go when you are not in the right mood or you are angry. Then my father says: 'Boy, were you mad!' 'Why?' 'Because the salsa came out spicy!'"]

All roads lead to Domingo Díaz. 26 de marzo 2001.

On a visit I made to the priest in the local chapel before Christmas, he did not want to speak to me about Ocotepec.[162] Instead, he gave me the name of Domingo Díaz. He was, according to the priest, the person who knew the most about local celebrations—*las costumbres navideñas*—and who had the oldest religious *imagenes* in town.[163] I had gone straight over to his house, and while he

[162] While the previous priest, who had been in Ocotepec for decades, was loved by the townspeople and was still invited to say Mass at private parties in people's homes during my year of fieldwork, this priest, whom rumor had it was replaced as part of a political shakedown by the local archdiocese, had not come near to replacing his predecessor in the hearts of the people or in the community life of the town. Knowing this, I nonetheless approached him for leads because I knew that community traditions revolved around the four barrio chapels of which his church was the administrative center.

[163] There may not be a Niñopa in Ocotepec, but there is no shortage of religious figures that are treated with the same devotion and respect and are likewise linked to community celebrations.

was not home, I did meet his daughter Susana, who invited me to a posada they were preparing and later told her father of my visit.

Months later, when I have no luck finding an informant in the *barrio de los Ramos*, I wander back again to the *barrio de Santa Cruz*. This time, a different daughter opens the wooden gate. She calls her father for me. Don Domingo receives me immediately, leading me through a large, central courtyard to one of four small adobe houses on the edges of the property. We sit in a room with a tiny window, one wall covered with portraits of deceased family members, the other, with images of religious figures. Two of this man's children and one son-in-law were killed in highway accidents: surely one of the costs of "progress*"* coming to Ocotepec in the form of the two highways which physically divide it.

Don Domingo sits down at a small square table where he has been transcribing sheet music with a quill pen, making copies for younger band members who have not yet learned their parts for the upcoming celebration on Holy Thursday and Holy Friday. Having completed over fifty pages already, there are at least that many more remaining. Clearly, a photocopy is not acceptable to this man, whose time and patience are equal to his respect for tradition.

Clearing his desk, Don Domingo invites me to open my notebook and take all the notes I want. Unlike the women with whom I speak in kitchens, he is evidently accustomed to interviews and to representing his community. Yet while he is not shy about my note taking, he tells me repeatedly that I do not need to write anything down, that he has it all written down for me already. Eventually, after delivering the oral version of the tale, he gets up and brings me a little book

about local Christmas traditions which he had published in 1995 with support from the state government.[164] "*There*," he says triumphantly, "*it is all right there."*

Of course it is not all there, the book containing only two pages of the history of Christmas traditions and his *imagenes* and none of the "insignificant" details from everyday life in which I am interested and which infiltrate his story. True to the oral version, however, it tells the saga of how the relics were hidden during the revolution of 1910 in the Cuernavaca Cathedral, and how Don Domingo's uncle of the same name inherited them after the previous owner—who had died during the revolution—did not pick them up and the man's family no longer wanted to be responsible for them. The priest, who was in charge of the state cathedral and was from Tepoztlán, gave them to him, arguing that someone from Ocotepec, the town of the original owner, should take them.

Don Domingo, born the same day as his uncle, August 7, inherited the man's name and his responsibility for keeping *las tradiciones* going. So, the *posadas* have been in his family's hands since 1920. The women in his family have maintained the tradition of making *mole* and tamales for even longer. In those days, he says, "*era poquita gente*" ["there were few people,"]—nothing like today. The *chiquihuite* would still be full of candy at the end of the night (Figure 92). "*No se terminaba la colación!"* ["The Christmas candy would not run out!"]

It is impossible to convince this 73-year old male spokesperson for local tradition of my interest in food and kitchens, although he agrees these are

[164] Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Unidad Morelos: Cantos y Alabanzas: Danza de Pastoras, Ocotepec, Morelos. 1995.

essential to the celebrations of which he speaks in detail. Nonetheless, his life story and perspectives provide an important social and historical context for what I see and hear in kitchens today.

Don Domingo's wife died three years ago, and he is sad and lonely despite being surrounded by family and very active in the community. "It is not the same for people who live alone their entire life," he says, "but we would have been married forty-seven years this year, and I still cry for her every night." He complains that his children do not let him have a new *compañera*, out of fear that a new woman will want part of the land that is their inheritance. "*Tienen miedo que una novia me robe"* ["They are afraid a girlfriend will rob me"], he says. "They do not have to worry," he assures me, "because I have already built them each a house and divided the property." He insists he could leave them alone with their land, but they will not hear of it. He could start all over again, he seems to be thinking aloud, though he admits it would be tiring to build yet another adobe house and he is not sure if he could do so at his age.

Reminiscing, Don Domingo tells me that neither he nor his wife knew anything at all when they were young, but that together—married at age twenty-four—they learned to move ahead in life: "*Aquí entre los dos aprendimos a progresar"* ["Between the two of us we learned to progress"]. He starting praying at age twenty-one, he says, referring to his leading the rosary at community events. His involvement with the Church was in part the reason why he inherited the *imagenes.*

"Mi esposa no sabía más que hacer tortillas y venderlas en el centro" ["My wife did not know anything but how to make tortillas and sell them downtown"], he says. She, like many other women of her generation and some still today in Ocotepec, brought in some income by making and selling tortillas. She sold fruit from their land as well.

His wife learned to sew in a course that was offered in nearby Cuernavaca. Don Domingo tells me that she was much better than the rest of the class, cutting the cloth in minutes and finishing her sewing before anyone else, heads turning when they heard her machine whirring. Forty-two minutes and the dress was made from start to finish, beginning with her drawing the pattern. "*Les ganó a todas*!" ["She beat them all!"] he says proudly. She began by sewing aprons and clothes for their six children. Then, one day a neighbor asked her for help making a dress for a *quinceaños,* and soon she was sewing for a living. Her sewing machine sits in one corner of the room where we sit.

Don Domingo learned to play trumpet while still in school, and was eventually invited to join the state band. He recalls his hesitation to abandon his cornfield and his embarrassment at not having money to buy the shoes he needed to be presentable for the job. "*Le entro o no*?" ["Should I join or not?"] "*Y la milpa?"* ["What about the cornfield?"] His father-in-law encouraged him and provided crucial support, agreeing to help with the harvest of whatever he sowed. "*Mi suegro me animó, me ayudó. Me dijo: 'es una cosa segura.'"* ["My father-in law encouraged me and helped me. He told me: 'It is a sure thing'"] Not like *el campo.*

Planting seems to be even more difficult today.

> *"Ya no hay donde sembrar, con la venta de terrenos y la construcción de carreteras. Hace como treinta años para acá ha cambiado mucho. Vino gente de afuera a vivir acá y nos robaron mucho en las noches.*[165] *Todo pasaron a destruir."*
>
> ["There is no place to plant anymore, with so much land sold and the construction of the highways. Much has changed in the last thirty years. People from other places came to live here and robbed us in the night. They destroyed everything."]

The land he does have—what used to be his cornfield—Don Domingo prefers to rent to a man who pays him per month to stack junk cars on it. He says that is better than people robbing him of his work. "*Es una de las situaciones más difíciles, uno siembra y luego va a cosechar y no hay nada."* ["It is one of the most difficult situations, when you plant and then at harvest time you go and there is nothing there."]

Don Domingo used to plant only corn, but then he and his wife had the idea of planting half of his field with *cempazuchitl.* When the flowers were in bloom during the season of the dead, he went to gather part of them for the altars of the *muertos chiquitos* or the souls of the dead children that are received on the first day. He planned to bring the rest of the harvest in the next morning. "*Al día*

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[165] Ocotepec welcomes visitors and has developed a large roadside economy selling food to tourists. Many locals have sold their land at lucrative prices to refugees of smog and stress from Mexico City . Yet there is a very strong attitude against outsiders—including governmental authorities from Cuernavaca—"stealing" their land. Local agrarian issues and organized opposition to changes in land use or ownership make the paper nearly every day. Several key government sponsored projects have been effectively stopped, and I was told that when a recent and much despised governor arrived for a visit, the people did not allow him to speak and instead asked him to leave. When the Zapatista peace caravan came through town on their "Peace March" to the Senate in February of 2001, the people of Ocotepec barred their passage and held an unscheduled meeting with the indigenous comandantes, who agreed to include Ocotepec's petition for respect for their land among the many petitions they were bringing to national attention.

siguiente no había nada. Ahí se me quitó las ganas de sembrar." ["The next day there was nothing left: and that is when I lost all desire to work the land."] The remainder of his crop had been stolen in the night.

"Mejor le rento el terreno a un señor con coches chocados y cada mes me da dinero, y con eso compramos elote, calabaza" ["Better to rent the land to the man with the junk cars and to buy my corn and squash with the money"], he concluded.

And yet, despite the changes in the land, Don Domingo assures me young people are keeping traditions alive: "*Mis hijas hacen el mole, las nietas ya van aprendiendo. Miran, y ya hacen tamales."* ["My daughters make *mole*, the nieces are learning also, they watch and they make tamales too."]

Why is this so important? I ask him, still trying to get him to address women's work in kitchens. Why do women work so hard to prepare food for the fiestas? "*Las personas que nos invitan, les damos el gusto de visitarlos, les mueve el corazón, sienten que Jesus está en su casa. Es el honor de apoyar la tradición."* ["The people who invite us (the band) are happy to have us visit. It moves their heart, they feel that Jesus is with them. It is for the honor of supporting the tradition."] Apparently, it is a pleasure, an honor, and an opportunity for visiting with people.

But what about everyday eating in his house, within the family? I ask. "We eat lots of meat now," he says, "mostly chicken, pork or beef. And always *sopa, de arroz o de pasta." "*And tortilla?" I ask. "Yes," he says, "but tortillas in many different ways, not just for tacos but in *picaditas* or *quesadillas* for

instance.*"* He says his family often buys *masa* at the *molino* and makes their own. When his children do not have to work—on a weekend or a holiday—they like to share a big family meal mid-morning in their common patio.

"Barremos temprano y regamos y sacamos el comál, y la bomba de gas o el carbon, y a hacer sopes o bisteces. Y ya. Y en la tarde cada quien a su casa." ["We sweep and water early in the morning, pull out the comal, and the tank of gas or the charcoal, and start making meat or sopes. And that's it. And in the afternoon, everyone goes back to their own house."]

As I leave the house, I walk past a counter covered with old tortillas spread out on top, drying out. I wonder where the chickens or pigs are that will be eating them.

Maria Soledad. July 2001.

Maria Soledad Díaz Ríos, 36 years old, is a preschool school teacher. She is enthusiastic and interested in my research. While it is her sister, Susana, who is called upon by acquaintances to make *mole* for fiestas, as the only unmarried daughter, it is Maria Soledad who cooks for the extended family everyday, including her sister's children. Not surprisingly, she says she does not like to cook, especially when she comes home from work tired and hungry and has to come up with a meal in a hurry that the children will not complain about. Nonetheless, she loves to experiment in the kitchen with new recipes, and enjoys cooking deserts on weekends when her sister cooks special meals for the family and she is relieved of kitchen duty.

"Aquí es el mole, esa el la tradición!" **["Here it is mole, that is the tradition!"]**

While her description of Ocotepec's food traditions matches what several other women have told me, I am initially interested in her perspective on this because of the role her family plays in community affairs.[166] "*Más que nada aquí en Ocotepec son sus fiestas…preparan la comida más típica de aquí, el mole. Aquí es el mole"* ["Ocotepec is known for its fiestas… and *mole* is the typical dish. Here, it is *mole*"].

On May 3rd, the date of the annual fiesta in her barrio, they prepare *mole* and invite friends and *compadres*,—"*y a toda persona que guste venir a la fiesta"* ["and anybody who wants to come to the fiesta"]. After hearing her detailed description of the different *mayordomos* who commit to hosting particular meals, I ask her how many different families participate as *mayordomos*. She counts aloud, breakfast, *comida, comida* for the chinelos, for the musicians, for the fireworks crew…for two whole days, and concludes that approximately ten households are involved with the food alone.

> *"Serán aproximadamente unas diez casas que tienen responsabilidad de mayordomo. Aparte lo otro—las flores, las velas, los músicos, los cohetes. Eso es nada más la comida. Y aparte la gente que no tenemos ninguna responsabilidad, pero como somos del barrio, tenemos que hacer alguna comida para invitar—como nada más en el puro barrio se hace la comida, se invita a la gente de otros barrios aquí…de Ocotepec, o gente del centro que conocemos y que conoce las costumbres de aquí de Ocotepec. Y se viene para acá. Eso es nada más la fiesta del 3 de mayo, la que es la fiesta de aquí del barrio. Pero aparte la fiesta grande es el 6 de agosto, la de*

[166] Because she is very articulate as well, and she did not object to my recording the interview, I am able to present not only the information here—which is similar to that presented elsewhere in this work—but also the precise way in which she expressed herself.

todo el pueblo. Y ahí es más gente. Todo el pueblo participa, empezando desde el día 2 de agosto."

["There must be approximately ten houses that have the responsibility of *mayordomo*. Besides that there is everything else—the flowers, candles, music, fireworks. That is just for the food. And in addition to that there is all of us who do not have a specific responsibility, but because we are from the barrio, we have to make a special meal and invite others—since it is only our barrio that makes food, we invite people from the other barrios…people from Ocotepec or people from downtown who know our customs. And they all come over here. That is just for the fiesta on May 3rd, the one that is our barrio's fiesta. Then there is the big fiesta on August 6th, the town's celebration. There are even more people then. The whole town participates, starting on August 2."]

"*Ya después de comer aquí se le dice, le mandamos el itacate. 'Tenga para que mañana se lo almuerze o se lo cene.' Como un agradecimiento de haber asistido a la fiesta o algo."* ["Then, after eating, we send them (guests) home with a plate or basket of food, their *itacate*. 'Here you go, for your lunch or dinner.' Like a token of appreciation for having participated or something."]

El mole y la sazón de la mamá **[Mole and mother's seasoning]**

"El mole en Ocotepec no es dulce porque no le ponemos chocolate, no se le pone platano. Se le pone cacao. O sea la semillita, tostada, y se muele junto con la almendra, las pasas. Se le pone pasa pero no mucha para que no salga dulce también. El mole es lo típico de aquí de Ocotepec. Entonces algunos dicen: 'Ay, este mole es comprado!' O sea, ya le saben el sabor! El comprado a veces sale dulce, o muy picoso. Y el mole de aquí no."

["The *mole* in Ocotepec is not sweet because we do not use chocolate, or banana. We use cacao. The seed, that is, toasted, and ground together with the almond, the raisins. We use raisins, but not much, so it will not be sweet. *Mole* is what is typical here in Ocotepec. So, some might say: 'Hey, this *mole* is store-bought!' In other words, they know the flavor! The one

that is purchased tastes sweet sometimes, or too spicy. But not the mole from here."]

"Más que nada al mole le dan sabor los condimentos. No le pone mucho de los condimentos, o los que son, que lleva el mole, y 'híijole, le faltó esta hierbita de olor'. O ' le falto almendra'. O sea, se sabe. O cuando sale muy picoso dicen 'no desvenaron bien el chile.' Porque se le desvena el chile para que no salga muy picoso."

["More than anything, what gives *mole* its flavor is the condiments. If you do not use too many, those that are the *mole* condiments, and 'hey, the *mole* is missing such and such an herb.' Or 'it needs more almonds'. In other words, you can taste it. Or if it is too spicy, they say: 'You did not take the veins out of the chili right.' Because you have to devein the chilies for it not to be too spicy."]

"El mole de Tepoztlán es diferente, porque en Tepoztlán le ponen menos condimentos también. Es menos condimentos y sabe más a chile que a mole. Es diferente en cada lugar y hasta en las mismas personas. Por ejemplo, aquí decimos: 'Híjoles, este mole lo preparó tal señora.' Porque este es su sazón de ella. Se sabe. Por ejemplo aquí las personas que nos visitan dicen: 'Oye, tu tienes el sazón de tu mama, porque así lo preparaba.' El sazón es el sabor. Yo creo que el sazón se da, depende si se sala, si le falta sal. Como que también eso le falta al sazón. O que no hirvió bien. Ya lo vamos a servir pero como que nó, todavía sabe mucho a chile. No sabe bien. Sabe a agua. Entonces que hierva un poquito más para que se le quite ese sabor. No es de la receta, ya es de uno. Es que nos enseñaron los papás o nuestra mamá nos enseñó a guisar, y ya es de uno pues."

["The *mole* in Tepoztlán is different, because in Tepoztlán they use fewer condiments too. It is less condiments and it tastes more like chili than like *mole*. It is different in each place and even between different people. For instance, here, we might say: 'Wow, this *mole* was prepared by such and such lady.' Because it is her *sazón.* You can taste it. For instance, the people who visit us here will say: 'You have your mother's *sazón*, that is how she prepared it.' *Sazón* is the flavor. I think things have *sazón* depending on whether you use enough salt, or not enough. Or if it did not boil right. Maybe we are ready to serve it but no, it still tastes too much like chili. It does not taste right. It tastes like water. Then you simmer it a little longer so it loses that taste. It is not about the recipe, it is about

oneself. It is the way our parents or our mother taught us to cook, and then it is just your way."]

Inheriting the mole

Maria Soledad laughs when I ask her how important the cook is for the community. *"Sin cocinera no hubiera fiesta!"* ["Without the *cocinera* there would be no fiestas!"] she says And while the older women who were recognized for their *mole* are dying out, the tradition continues, with younger women taking their place. In her family's case, her sister Susana inherited her mother's *sazón*.

> *"Aquí la tradición es que si tenemos un gasto fuerte, invitamos a gente, por ejemplo familia, que nos venga a ayudar a prepara comida. Antes decíamos: 'Vamos a ver a tal señora, ya está grande, sabe preparar la comida'. Ahora ya casi no se hace porque la gente ya se esta acabando. Pero sigue la tradición. Bueno cuando menos en nuestro caso, mi mamá preparó un mole muy rico. Y lo heredó mi hermana, Susana. A veces viene mi tía: 'Quiero que vayas a preparar mi mole.' Pues sí se va, o sea sí se presta para preparar el mole [su hermana Susana]. Porque se tiene que guisar las cosas, los condimentos y todo."*
>
> ["Here, the tradition is that if we have a big expense, we invite people, such as family members, to help us prepare the meal. Before we used to say: 'Let's go see such and such a lady; she is old and knows how to prepare the food'. But we do not hardly do that anymore because the people are almost all dying off now. But the tradition continues. Well, at least in our case, my mother prepared a delicious *mole*. And my sister, Susana, inherited it. Sometimes my aunt comes looking for her: 'I want you to prepare my *mole*.' And she does go, she lends herself for preparing the *mole*. Because you have to cook everything, the condiments and everything."]

Changes

In a curious turn of phrase, Maria Soledad describes how Ocotepec is "almost becoming a city already." *"Ya casi va siendo ciudad."* Things are not like they used to be anymore. *"Antes aquí eran sembradíos. Ya ahora ya la gente ya no siembra, ya casi no hay lugar para sembrar."* ["Before this was all cultivated land. Now people do not plant anymore, there is almost no place left to plant in anymore."]

Before, many people earned their living gathering and selling firewood from the towns' communal lands. This has changed now that most women prefer gas stoves to firewood for cooking most of the time, though firewood is still used for fiestas.

> *"Se sigue usando leña pero ya muy poca la compra. Ya casi ya no. Si la compramos es para una fiesta, para cocinar afuera. No se hace poca comida, se hace bastante! Son cazuelones, y hierve más rápido con la leña que con el gas. Y sabe distinto. Aquí no se utilizan caserolas de peltre ni de aluminio. Son cazuelas de barro, son grandes. Les dicen cazuelas moleras."*
>
> ["Firewood is still used but few people buy it anymore. Almost never. If we buy it, it is for a fiesta, to cook outdoors. It is not a little food that is made, it is a whole lot! They are giant pots, and things cook faster with firewood than with gas. And it tastes different. We do not use enamel coated or aluminum pots here. We use clay pots, the big ones. They are called *mole* pots."]
>
> "The *mole* has sesame seeds even now, though people use less and less condiments. They are still an important part of the *mole*. Before we used the condiments including sesame seeds, cocoa beans, seeds,[167] peanuts. We still do, but in lesser quantities. Now it tastes more like chili than anything. And of course, the condiments are more expensive too now, so we do not use too many anymore."

[167] *Semillitas*---i.e. I assume she refers to pumpkin seeds.

***"Antes teníamos muchos puercos."* ["We used to have lots of pigs."]**

Another change has been that in Ocotepec, as in Tetecala and Xochimilco, increasing urbanization has been accompanied by an intolerance of animal smells. "Everything bothers us nowadays," Maria Soledad complains. Although her family always had many pigs in a pen in the yard, now they had none because it bothers the neighbors. She laments the fact that there are no more pigs, not only because they were good to eat, but because now she has to throw away all the food scraps they used to eat.

> *"Puercos, antes teníamos muchos puercos. Pero la cosa es que como a los vecinos les molesta el olor y todo eso. Antes no les molestaba el olor y toda la gente tenía, pero ahora ya nos molesta todo. Es la misma gente, pero, ya son hijos, y como que ya no quieren tener animales. Y pues yo digo que un animalito, por ejemplo un marrano, pues si tenemos su chiquero, no? Y era ayuda porque a veces el desperdicio, lo que sale de la comida, en lugar de darsela al marranito que es algo que después se vende o se mata y sirve para comer, pues a la basura. Entonces ya no juntamos el desperdicio. Las tortillas que quedaban mucho, ya en lugar de juntarla, a la basura. Y pues es desperdicio, no? Es desperdicio. Pues nosotros siempre habíamos tenido marranos, siempre, siempre. Ahora a veces se los damos a los perros, pero los perros a veces de tanto ya no quieren, o hay comida que no les gusta y el marrano se come todo. Todo."*
>
> ["Pigs. We used to have lots of pigs. But the thing is that since it bothers the neighbors and all that. Before, the smells did not bother them and everyone had pigs, but now everything bothers us. It is the same people, but now their children, and it is like they do not want animals anymore. And I say, well, a little animal, a pig, for example. I mean, we have their pen don't we? And it was a help because now the scraps that come from the kitchen, that we used to give the piggies that we then sold or ate, now they go to waste. And they are scraps aren't they? I mean, they are scraps. Well, we always had pigs; always, always. Now, we sometimes give them to the dogs, but sometimes from getting too many, they just do not want

them. And besides, there is some food they do not even like, and the pigs eat everything. Everything."]

Kitchenspace

When I ask Maria Soledad to draw her kitchen, she hesitates and asks: *"La cocina, la del diario?"*[The kitchen, the everyday kitchen?"] Despite her initial resistance, she does eventually map both the everyday and *leña* or firewood kitchen, spending more time describing the latter.

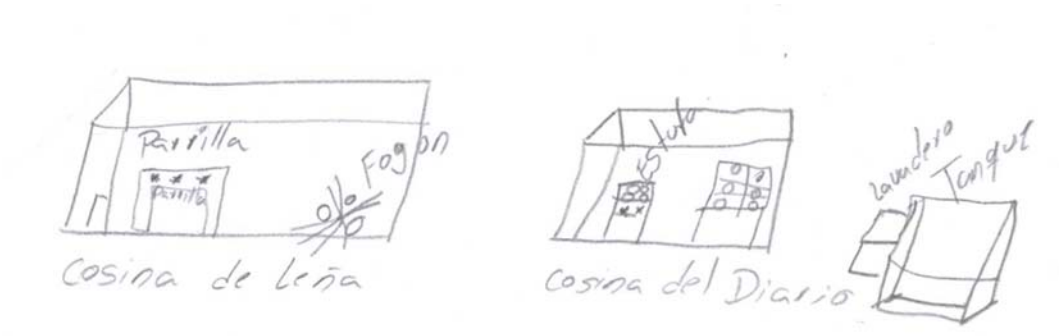

Figure 97: Maria Soledad's map of her kitchenspace

"Aquí está mi parrilla, mi fogón, aquí puse mi estufa, y este es mi trastero." ["Here is my grill, my hearth, here I put my stove, and her is the rack for my dishes."] She refers to her *metate* and her blender, one indoor and one out. *"Para moler, está afuera, por el lavadero, está en el patio."* ["For grinding, it is outdoors, by the sink, in the patio."] She uses the *metate* to grind beans when she makes the *tlaxcales*[168] for the days of the dead, after first cooking them with *tequesquite*. When she makes tortillas at home, she uses the *metate* to knead the

[168] See description in next entry.

dough, arguing that it is the right shape and provides a good space to lean on when kneading the dough. "*Lo ocupo para la masa, para tortilla. Para amasar. Porque es un espacio más como para recargarse encima. Por la forma. Sí. Por la forma y para recargarse, y se amase bien la masa."* ["I use it for the dough, for the tortilla. To knead the dough. Because it is one more space, like to lean on. Because of its shape. Yes, because of its shape and to lean on, it serves well for kneading the dough."]

The *metate* is in the smoke kitchen, the blender is indoors. While the first is in the patio, it has a roof and can be closed fully, which she says is important when you make a lot of food for a fiesta, so the animals do not get in. *"Lo que pasa es que si hacemos comida en gran cantidad, pues ahí cerramos y se puede quedar. Y no se meten los animales."* ["The thing is that if we make food for a fiesta in great quantities, we can close that and it can stay there. And the animals can not get in."]

The patio has three different herbs growing: spearmint, *epazote*, and chamomile. Besides the pigs, the family once had many chickens. A lone hen is all that remains today. The rest became ill suddenly and died after her mother passed away. People say this was to be expected, Maria Soledad explains, as everything that was her mother's is lost, her cooking pots as well as her chickens. "It is true," Maria Soledad laughs, "all her pots have holes in them now."

> *"Según dicen las creencias, como los pollos eran de mi mamá, y mi mamá falleció, dicen que todo lo que era de ella se pierde. Entonces ella les daba de comer. Pero igual cuando se murió, igual les dábamos de comer. Nos encargábamos, pero eran de ella. Pero no, dicen no, 'todo lo que dejó tu mamá, todo, si dejó cazuelas, todo se va a quebrar' Y pues sí es cierto, porque las ollas de peltre se están agujerando. Y un día amaneció todos*

muertos. Lo único, anda una gallina por ahí. Pero nada más tenemos una."

["According to the beliefs, since the chickens belonged to my mother, and my mother passed away, they say that everything that was hers is lost. And she is the one who used to feed them. But still, when she died, we still fed them. We took care of them, but they were hers. But, no, they say that no: 'everything your mother left, if she left cooking pots, everything is going to break.' And yes, it is true, because the enamel pots she left are getting holes in them. And one day, they were all dead in the morning. The only one is that hen running around there. But we only have one."]

Clay pots seem to have many traditional beliefs associated with them. They not only provide a link to loved ones in the world of the dead but with people in this world as well.

"Hay un dicho que dice que si usted quiere que venga alguna persona rápido, que le grite a una olla, y la persona viene rápido. O sea, que a la olla le da el nombre de la persona que le urge ver. Grítele en una olla y la persona llega."

["The saying goes, that if you need to see a person in a hurry, you yell their name into a pot and they will come right away. In other words, you give the pot the name of the person you urgently need to see. Yell it into the pot, and the person arrives."]

Los tlaxcales y los muertos

"The special food I remember my mother making that we all loved and that you do not hardly find anymore is the *tlaxcales.* You make them during the days of the dead, that is when the corn is just right. Only older people know how to make them anymore. They are like tortillas but thicker. Or sort of like a type of *enfrijolada*, (tortilla with ground beans) but instead of cooking them in a pan, you grill them on a comal."

"Es maíz, del que ya va para mazorca, o sea que ya está ni muy tierno ni muy duro. Se muele, se lleva al molino, y con eso mismo ya nomás le ponen azucar. Azucar y se les pone –a algunos tlaxcales se les pone frijol de china. Y al frijol de china también se le pone azucar. Entonces salen

dulces los tlaxcales. Y tienen un olor muy rico que ahora vamos y pues no es igual a los tlaxcales que venden en el mercado que los que uno está haciendo. Porque era puro maíz. Ahora ya les ponen un poco de harina porque el que no los sabe hacer, se parte. Ya ahora ya nadie las sabe hacer."

["They are made of corn that is about to become *mazorca*—that is, neither too soft nor too hard. You grind it. You take it to the mill to grind it and you mix it with sugar and that's it. Some *tlaxcales* have special beans and sugar too—then the *tlaxcales* come out sweet. They have a wonderful smell. They are nothing like what they sell in the market, those ones we made at home. Because it was pure corn. Now they mix a bit of flour in them because if you do not know how to make them, they break. Nobody knows how to make them anymore."]

"Y aquí la costumbre es que después del día dos, ocho días después del día dos del día de muertos, de noviembre, se les pone, porque supuestamente ya se van los difuntos. Entonces ocho días del día primero se les ponen los tlaxcales, o tamales de elote a los niños. Con eso se despide a los niños, y su cafecito, o su atole, como uno guste. Al otro día, ocho días después del día dos, se le pone tamales de carne a los difuntos grandes. Con chile. Para despedirlos, que son su comida para el camino. Aquí después del día de muertos, porque ya se van. Después de estar ocho días con nosotros—llegan el día primero, los niños llegan el día primero, y se van el día ocho. Y el día nueve se van la gente adulta."

["The custom here is that after the second, a week after November 2, of the days of the dead, you put them on the altar because that is when the souls depart. So, a week after November 1 is when you put out the *tlaxcales*, or tamales made of sweet corn, for the children. So that is how you send the children off, with their coffee, or their *atole*, as you like. The next day, a week after November 2, you make meat tamales for the grown-up ghosts. With chile. To send them off, it is their food for the road. Here we do that after the days of the dead, because they leave. After being with us for a week—the children arrive on the first and they leave on the eighth. On the ninth the adults leave."]

I ask Maria Soledad what happens if they do not leave food for the dead. "*Pues, supuestamente, nosotros la creencia que tenemos es que no van a tener algo que comer durante su camino. Entonces no pasa nada, pero ya es la*

costumbre que tenemos, que hay que poner." ["Supposedly, our belief is that they will not have anything to eat on their journey. So, nothing happens, but the custom that we have is that you have to set the food out for them."]

The custom is to have the *ofrenda* ready by noon, because the souls each return to their home at that time.

> *"Si a esa hora todavía no está—porque se les pone el mole, se le pone los chayotes hervidos, se les pone el pan de muertos, el plátano, las manzanas y todo. Si a esa hora todavía no tenemos la comida, por lo menos se le pone un vasito de agua, sus tortillas y un platito con sal. Para que tomen el agua mientras está—como llegan cansados, para que tomen su agua y descansen. Y se tiende su petate, para que lleguen y descansen ahí en el petate. Sis es ofrenda nueva, o sea muerto del año, tiene que ser petate nueva. Si no, nó, el que se tiene está bien."*
>
> ["If at that time everything is not ready yet—because you have to serve the *mole*, the boiled chayotes,[169] the bread for the dead, the bananas, apples and everything. So if at that time all the food is not ready yet, at least you set out a glass of water, tortillas, and a little plate with salt.[170] So they can have a glass of water while the food is being prepared—since they arrive tired from the journey; so they can have a glass of water and rest. And you lay out their *petate* (traditional woven mat). If it is a new offering, in other words if it is a death from that year, then it has to be a new petate. If not, then whichever *petate* is fine."]

Maíz dulce y frijoles gueritos [Sweet corn and light colored beans]

> "Everyone will tell you that tortillas made of *nixtamal* and over a firewood stove, and beans cooked in the traditional clay pot—*frijoles de olla*—are

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[169] The tradition is the native spiny chayote squash that is cooked outdoors over a woodfire for hours.

[170] Others have told me that at the very least they need a glass of water and a candle. The candle, which I think Maria Soledad is forgetting in this conversation, is to light their way and help them find their way home. That is the belief in Xochimilco in any case; though in Ocotepec the pathways of *cempazuchitl* petals serve the same function but are always accompanied with candles.

much tastier. Of course, tortillas made at home are much better than the ones sold in *tortillerías*."

> *"Más que nada porque si la masa es con nixtamal y todo, las tortillas saben dulces. Como dulcecitas, tienen otro sabor. Tienen otro sabor a la de tortilleria. Porque en la tortillería hasta las compra uno y saben a crudo."*
>
> ["More than anything, if the dough is from *nixtamal* and all, the tortillas taste sweet. They are sweet, they have a different taste. Because the ones in the *tortillerías*, you buy them and they even taste like raw."]

The clay-cooked beans are preferable not only for the flavor but because they are lighter in color, even though it is faster to cook them in an aluminum pan. In the latter they taste like water, like they were cooked against their will, Maria Soledad explains.

> *"Los de olla, hasta el sabor, y más que nada salen más gueritos. Como que si los pone usted en la olla de peltre o de aluminio, salen negritos. Y eso sí se lo hemos notado. No se si será que nosotros siempre hemos ocupado la de barro, pero una vez, que llegamos, y que 'híjoles, tenemos que cocer los frijoles para tal hora', los pusimos en aluminio porque es más rápido. Entonces salen más negritos, y en el sabor se notaba, sabían a agua—como que se cocieron como que a fuerzas! Entonces, sí tiene un sabor diferente."*
>
> ["The ones in the pot, even the flavor, but especially, they come out lighter in color (blond). Like, if you put them in an enamel pot or aluminum, they come out dark (black). We have observed that. I do not know if it is because we have always used clay pots, but one time we came home and, 'oh no, we have to get the beans ready for a certain time', and we put them in an aluminum pan for them to cook faster. Then they come out darker, and you can taste it too—as if they were forced to cook! So, they do have a different flavor."]

Every day

"The cook has to know how to make the menu a little interesting even if she uses more or less the same ingredients," Maria Soledad tells me, "otherwise people will not eat it. Chicken soup, for instance." *"Que pues, nada más el caldito. Llegamos y para rápido, lavamos el pollo y al agua."* ["Sometimes we are in a hurry and just to be quick, we wash the chicken and into the water."] *"Y a veces, ya nos cansó: diario caldo de pollo!"* ["And sometimes, we are just tired of it: chicken soup every day!]"

Maria Soledad imitates the voices of her nieces and nephews: "*Ay! Otra vez vamos a comer otro pollo!? Ay, ay ay pollo! Pero en caldo no. No."* ["Oh! Chicken again? Not again! Yuck, chicken. Not in soup again. No."]

Maria Soledad goes on to describe the situation that many women cooking for families the world over would recognize: she has to find a way of feeding hungry but finicky children by using her creativity to make a variety of dishes with the same basic ingredients. She says the cook is important—even if she is "not really a cook"—but "just cooking."

> "*Pues, un guisado. Entonces, pues hay que estarle variando. Entonces yo digo que sí es importante la cocinera. Y aunque no sea cocinera! Hay que estar —'ay, qué vamos a comer? Hoy qué vamos a comer?' No, pues hay que cambiarle a otra cosa. Hay que darle variedad."*
>
> ["Well, so a stew. But you have to be varying things. The cook has to come up with a stew and vary things from one day to another. So, I say the cook is important. And even if she is not a cook! You have to be putting up with 'What are we eating today? What's cooking?' No, you have to change thing. You have to provide variety."]
>
> *"Como que se ve que ahora se come más carne que verdura. Antes nos conformábamos con unos frijolitos y un huevo. Ahora, 'ay, esto es*

> *comida?' Como que queremos algo más. Y antes pues no, lo que hubiera: verdura, calabazitas fritas, hervida nada más o con el jitomatito. Pero ahora ya no, como que se busca más la carne."*
>
> ["It is like now we eat more meat than vegetables. Before we were satisfied with some beans and an egg. Now it is: 'What, is this food?' Like we want something more. And before, that was not so. Whatever there was fine: vegetables, fried or boiled squash, or something in tomato sauce. But not now. Now we want more meat."]

Like most women whom I interviewed, Maria Soledad did not consider herself a *cocinera* or cook, or necessarily thought she knew how "to cook." Instead, she and others like her, often think they know how "to prepare food", or make a pot of rice—in other words, the work without the status. Very few women are considered "*cocineras*" by their communities or their families, sometimes not even those who know the *mole* recipe and are called on to make sure a special event is properly celebrated.

> *"Yo no tengo niños. De mis sobrinas y de mi papá son los que comen conmigo. Mi hermana trabaja en la tarde, entonces durante los cinco días de la semana yo cocino, sábado y domingo le tocan a ella. Sí, yo soy la que cocina de diario, a pesar de que trabajo todos los días. Es una hazaña."*
>
> ["I do not have children. Those that eat here are from my nieces and father. My sister works in the afternoon, so the five days of the week, I cook, and on Saturdays and Sundays they are hers. Yes, I am the everyday cook, even though I work everyday myself. It is quite a feat."]

***"No me gusta cocinar!"* ["I don't like to cook!"]**

"No me gusta cocinar!" Maria Soledad laughs, *"porque se me hace muy laborioso la cocina*." ["I don't like to cook! Because the kitchen is too much work."] Like several other women I met who were responsible for preparing food

on a daily basis in addition to working outside the home, Maria Soledad does not enjoy cooking when she comes home from work tired and hungry. While she particularly dislikes making *chiles rellenos* and other complicated recipes that her family sometimes demands, she does enjoy trying out new recipes and experimenting with deserts on weekends when her sister takes over in the kitchen. Describing the never-ending chores in the kitchen, she says she is grateful that at least her family does not eat dinner.

> *"No me gusta cocinar! Aparte que no tenemos el tiempo, se me hace como que—'híjoles cocinar!' Apenas acabé de hacer el almuerzo y pensar de que vas a hacer de comer! Y, por fortuna no cenamos! Hay comidas laboriosas, que dicen, por ejemplo: 'Ay, vamos a hacer chiles rellenos! Yo quiero comer chiles rellenos!' Bien laboriosos, estar cociendo los chiles, pelandolos, rellenandolos. No los gusta comer, pero no nos gusta hacerlos! Aparte de que la comida sea laboriosa, lo que no me gusta es cocinar con hambre. Que yo quiera hacerlo rápido para comer o llega uno cansado del trabajo y 'órale, vamos a comer algo sencillo'—rápido, guiso y a comer. No, pues 'yo ya tengo hambre'. Bueno al menos en mi trabajo como no nos dejan comer nada. Yo entro desde antes de las nueve y llegó a la casa como a la una. Y en lugar de comer algo—a la cocina a preparar la comida! Eso sí da coraje, cocinar con hambre, y que sea la comida laboriosa, pues peor tantito!"*
>
> ["I do not like to cook. Besides that we do not have the time, it just seems like—'ugh, cooking!' I just finished with brunch and to think I have to prepare the mid-day meal! And, luckily, we do not have dinner! There are some very laborious meals. Like, they will say, for instance: 'Let's make *chiles rellenos*. I want to eat *chiles rellenos*!' Very labor intensive to be grilling the chilies, peeling them, stuffing them—we like to eat them, but we do not like to make them! If I want to make something quick for the meal, I get home tired from work and, 'let's make something simple'. I cook quickly, and we eat. Well, but I am already really hungry. In my work at least, we are not allowed to eat. I go in at nine and come home at one. But instead of eating something—to the kitchen to cook! That makes you mad, cooking while you are hungry, so, the more laborious meal, well that is even worse!"]

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter Ten: Analysis and Conclusions

Kitchenspace[171] is a privileged and gendered site of social and cultural reproduction where a society's relationship with nature is inscribed in the patterns of everyday life and ritual celebrations. It is a site of adaptation and innovation where gendered subjects work within the parameters of cultural boundaries to accommodate changes in the natural and social landscapes. In my research communities—Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala—kitchenspace is a place from which to taste the environments to which they are linked (through markets and local food production) and observe the social reality in which they are immersed. Kitchenspace is vital to the individual and collective experience in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala. Like other sustaining pillars on which a culture rests or human life requires, such as corn or clean air in central Mexico, it is often taken for granted until its loss or alteration awakens us to their value.

In my region of work, kitchenspace is unequivocally gendered, constructed as feminine through women's activities, responsibilities, and power therein, their work, narratives, and aesthetics. It is a space in which gendered and embodied knowledge is selectively transmitted to younger generations, and where children are literally fed the traditions and beliefs of older generations through quasi-sacramental food rites that make up the fabric of everyday life. It is at once the center of the household, and—in times of traditional celebrations—the center

[171] See Appendix C, Diagram of Social and Cultural Reproduction in Kitchenspace.

of community life. Here, reciprocity networks are strengthened while women transmit everything from recipes to organizational forms from one generation to the next.

Data from my sites suggest that although women's roles in kitchenspace may share some characteristics in different parts of the world or within one culture region—in this case the responsibility of preparing meals for the household on a daily basis and participating in community life via food preparation—these are mediated by the geographic specificity of their particular location. In addition to always reflecting the economic status of a particular household and often the climate and vegetation of its geographic location, kitchenspace reflects factors such as ethnicity, religious practices, and generational differences. A sensitive observer of culture can find in the persistence of food traditions, locally specific manifestations of attachment to place, and women who are experts at adapting to change.

The examples from my fieldwork testify to the profound cultural importance of food and kitchenspace in central Mexico. Although this study is limited to Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala, I venture that kitchenspace in other regions also provides a unique perspective on the changing relationship between society and the natural environment. Because of the inherently dynamic characteristics of kitchenspace and its essential function in humankind's physical survival, it is also a rich area in which to explore strategies of cultural adaptation and innovation, as well as gender roles and relationships.

REVIEW OF INQUIRY

I sought to understand the lifeworld of ordinary women in three semi-urban communities in central Mexico—Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala, —particularly how they experienced nature in their everyday lives. For strategic reasons, and because women in this region are the unquestionable authorities in the kitchen, women's food gathering and preparation activities set the parameters of my inquiry. I did not—and do not—purport to be comprehensive in this academic pursuit, but rather to provide some partial perspectives or "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1996) grounded in women's embodied experiences in particular spaces and places. I chose a region where many women spend much of their time and energy in kitchenspace and have tremendous—though little recognized—social impact from there. Using qualitative research methods for an ethnographic approach, I adapted a feminist political ecology framework to explore gendered spaces, gendered knowledge, and narratives of cultural identity.

After several months of participant-observation and open-ended interviews, I developed three specific questions that shaped the remainder of my fieldwork and which I explored using structured interviews and participative mapping, in addition to continued participant-observation. I asked:

- What are the gendered spaces in the landscape associated with food gathering and preparation and how have women adapted to changes in these spaces during their lifetime?

- What do women know about their environment from the context of food gathering and preparation in their everyday lives and how do they interact with nature in this context? And
- What can women's narratives about food in their specific geographic contexts tell us about their culture and identity?

Building on previous relationships and years of experience in my region of study, I spent eleven months from August of 2000 until July of 2001, dividing my time between three communities and various households, seeking to understand women's experiences, perspectives, and spaces. Inspired by Richardson's creative and multidisciplinary approach to place (Richardson 1982, 1984, 1990)[172] I chose a non-linear narrative to present my results and attempt an approximation of "being in kitchenspace."

Although my inquiry included both food gathering and preparation, and the former provides an important frame of reference and context for this study, the primary focus of this written work is the latter. Food gathering spaces—including fields, markets, and the house-lot garden—are linked to kitchenspace not only as sources of inputs but from the perspective of "reach" (Buttimer 1980): they are often among the few spaces outside of the parameters of the home that are regularly accessible to many women in my community, and are often legitimate

[172]Miles Richardson's *Being-in-the-market versus being-in-the-plaza* (1982) struck a chord with me, as did his general approach to place as experience and his critique of the anthropologist's project (1984, 1990).

only on the basis of their relationship to kitchenspace itself.[173] At the center of my analysis, and unique among food gathering and preparation spaces in my region of study, the house-lot garden is also women's domain.

This work seeks to bring the attention of cultural, political, and feminist geographers to the often neglected and gendered spaces of everyday life. In addition, and in other forums, I hope to bring the attention of feminists, humanists, and social scientists outside of geography to the potential contributions of cultural geography and feminist research methods to other academic fields. Finally, I hope to encourage others to pay attention to the lives of ordinary people—including women—and the spaces of everyday living.

KITCHENSPACE

Tita's world

In Laura Esquivel's popular novel and movie, *Like Water for Chocolate,* the kitchen provides a unique window onto Mexican culture and identity, and a world where people's sense of home is locked into the aromas and flavors of their childhood. Esquivel creates a text that her publisher classifies as fiction, yet it is more successful than much non-fiction at providing us with a taste of reality in the extraordinary and gendered world of traditional food preparation in Mexico (Figure 98). The text describes Tita's domain—her kitchenspace—as a "gigantic

[173] One elderly woman pointed out to me that the daily trip to the market or the *tortillería* is exciting for young women who are rarely allowed outside of the house without supervision but is just another chore for older women.

world" through which she comes to know life and which stands in contrast to the world outside:

> *"No era fácil para una persona que conoció la vida a través de la cocina entender el mundo exterior. Ese gigantesco mundo que empezaba de la puerta de la cocina hacia el interior de la casa, porque el que colindaba con la puerta trasera de la cocina y que daba al patio, a la huerta, a la hortaliza, sí le pertenecía por completo, lo dominaba."* (Esquivel 1989: 15)
>
> ["It was not easy for a person who knew life through the kitchen to understand the outside world. That gigantic world that began at the kitchen door towards the interior of the house, because the one that adjoined the back door of the kitchen and that led to the patio, the orchard, and the vegetable garden, that one belonged to her completely, she dominated it."]

Figure 98: Maria Teresa's *cocina de humo* with two large *cazuelas* for *mole*.

Kitchenspace is certainly a "gigantic world," but it is not necessarily distinctly separate from the world outside. The dichotomy between public and private realms to which Esquivel alludes contrasts with the situation I found in my research communities. The collective work structures that bring neighborhood women together with their *comadres* to prepare for different types of gatherings blurs the distinction between domestic and public.[174] When food preparation links one household to another as in a wedding feast, or one community with another, as when receiving a *promesa* from a visiting pilgrimage, kitchenspace is unquestionably semi-public space, as it serves to establish or strengthen relationships with the outside world.

Because of the essential role that women's practices in kitchenspace play in establishing alliances and maintaining reciprocity networks, kitchenspace is a site of social reproduction. By keeping alive, celebrating, and transmitting values and ways of doing and being to new generations, kitchenspace facilitates cultural reproduction in my region of study.

THE HOUSE-LOT GARDEN

Like that of most women in my research, Tita's kitchenspace extends beyond the parameters of the indoor kitchen and includes the outdoor space behind or in the center of the house to which I refer as the house-lot garden.[175] Here, women are responsible for a variety of food-related activities, from raising

[174] The women's movement and feminist scholars have long established the personal as political, and domestic issues, including domestic violence, as public.
[175] I thank Antoinette WinklerPrins (2001) for suggesting the term and providing me with her ample bibliography in preparation for our session at the 2002 AAG.

pigs and chickens to stirring pots and flipping tortillas on the comal, as well as tending to plants and small children. Notwithstanding regional differences with the northern Mexican borderlands that are the setting for *Like Water for Chocolate*, exploring kitchenspaces in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetacala provides glimpses of the gendered worlds inhabited by women such as Señora Rosa or Doña Margarita in Xochimilco, Doña Rosalinda or Maria Teresa in Ocotepec, and Esmeralda or Doña Eustoquia in Tetecala.

Figure 99: *Mixiotes* steaming in Señora Rosa's house-lot garden

I coined the term "kitchenspace" out of the need to refer to the spaces where women prepared food in my research sites and which I felt the word "kitchen" did not adequately identify (Figure 99). For me, coming from a Western European tradition, the word "*cocina*" or "kitchen" brings to mind an indoor space with four walls and a roof. Yet the food preparation sites I explored often had no walls at all, and if they did, they seemed to spill over into the outdoors or house-lot garden. When Esmeralda, my informant in Tetecala, made a comment about not wanting to spend her life "*dentro de estas cuatro paredes*" ["within these four walls"] as she felt her family wanted her to do, I chuckled because the space in which she prepared food all day long, day after day, had three walls and not four. While she clearly felt trapped by the social expectations that restricted her movement and options in life, the physical structure of her kitchen did not match her mental image of a closed space. The boundaries of kitchenspace are evidently defined by social activity and gendered relationships rather than by physical structures.

Several geographers have explored human interactions with the environment in the space just outside the home, beginning in 1966 with Clarissa Kimber's work with dooryard gardens in Martinique. Edgar Anderson's "dump heap" theory on the origins of agriculture is based on his study of kitchen middens in Mexico (Anderson 1967). Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1985) take a postmodern approach to the yard[176] and deconstruct the relationship between nature and culture as they decipher Australian popular culture in ordinary spaces.

[176] And the house, the pub, the beach, and other ordinary spaces.

Westmacott explores African-American gardens and yards in the rural South, considering them a physical expression of a culture group and mapping what he considers to be its three major functions (1992).[177]

Eric Keys uses a feminist political ecology approach to explore Kaqchikel gardens among the Maya of Highland Guatemala (1999). He found that women "linked to home because of domestic duties and culturally-based domestic expectations, undertake complex garden management intertwined with many other activities" (Keys 1999: 92) and were the primary mentors for children's early understanding of human environment relationships learned within this space. [178] Gardens, Keys said, remain "an essential element in Kaqchikel life, even within an urban context" (Keys 1999: 98). Looking at house-lot gardens in Brazil, Antoinette WinklerPrins (2001) also considers gender and urban/rural relationships, and finds that house-lot gardens serve as an emotional buffer in urbanization and help sustain critical social networks. Her work also shows that women do most of the gardening and that their activities are important for the maintenance of cultural identity. Laurie Greenberg's dissertation (1996) on ethnicity and change in Yucatec immigrant house lots in Quintana Roo maps some important dimensions of kitchenspace in connection to the house lot and states that cuisine is important as a motivation for traditional crop conservation.

[177] The three functions Westmacott describes are: 1) contribution to subsistence, 2) utility as kitchen extension for household chores, and 3) for entertainment, recreation, and display.
[178] I was surprised with the similarity with my project upon reading his article after writing my prospectus for this dissertation. At that point, I did not intend to explore the space of gardens, but rather the activity of food preparation, and I could not imagine how closely my findings would coincide with his.

Her work confirms that house lots are sites of conservation of traditional crop species and varieties that in turn assure the conservation of traditional cuisine.

MARIA TERESA'S KITCHEN

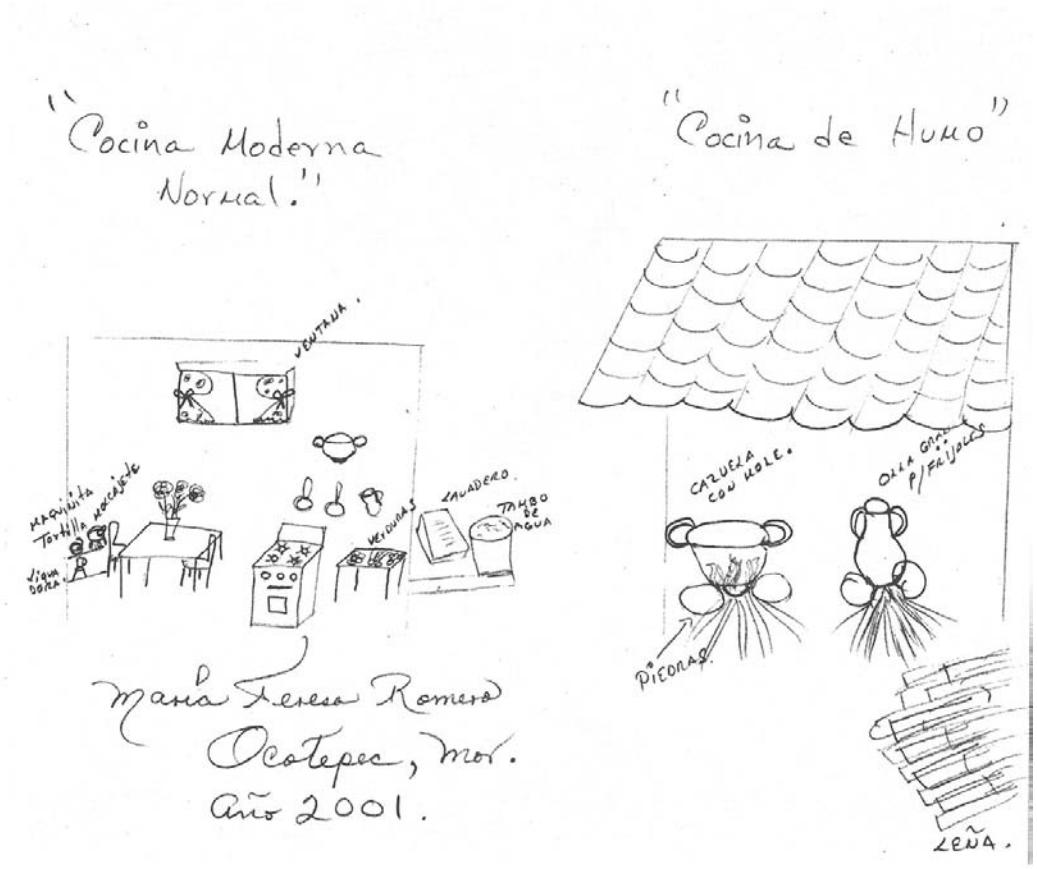

Figure 100: Maria Teresa's map of her *modern* and *smoke* kitchens

Maria Teresa, an informant in Ocotepec, brought the dual nature of kitchenspace to my attention. When I requested that she draw a map of her kitchen, she asked me: "Which kitchen, the indoor or the outdoor kitchen? The

everyday or the fiesta kitchen?" In the communities where I was working, the two usually co-existed, and despite some overlap, each was associated with different social functions. The flowers on the kitchen table and curtains in the window in her drawing called my attention to the importance of aesthetics in kitchenspace as well.

Food preparation for fiestas usually took place in the *cocina de humo* or smoke kitchen, also called *cocina de fiesta* by some, which was always separate from the main structure and often fully out of doors. It might have four walls, a roof for shade, or no permanent protection from the weather at all. The following describes some physical attributes of the kitchenspaces I visited:

- With few exceptions, houses had both outdoor and indoor kitchenspaces
- Usually, the only access to water was outdoors
- Sometimes, the only cooking space was outdoors as well
- The majority of women with kitchens that were at least partially indoors still carried out part of their everyday food preparation activities outdoors, particularly those involving water or fire
- Many women used the hearth in the house-lot garden to make tortillas on a periodic—if not daily—basis, and for steaming tamales or *mixiotes* for special occasions
- The gas stove was often (though not always) indoors, and the firewood stove was often (though not always) outdoors

- The majority, if not all homes, also had a portable, outdoor stove called an "*anafre*" or "*bracero*" usually fueled with charcoal, or attached to a small tank of gas

In some homes, the *anafre* or *bracero* (Figure 80) might take the place of the traditional smoke kitchen, though more often it complemented it. Food vendors commonly use the *anafre* to cook or reheat food at the market or on the street.

THE TLICUIL, HEARTH AND HEART OF KITCHENSPACE

According to Guillermo Helbling, a senior researcher at the Morelos Institute of Culture, "the heart of the home in Morelos is without a doubt the place occupied by the *clecuil*"[179] which the family gathers around to share food (Helbling 1000: 33). "*La cocina es el lugar más reservado del hogar"* ["The kitchen is the most reserved place of the home"], he warned me, saying that it would be impossible for me to access kitchens in my research.[180] The *clecuil,* he says, is a construction made partially out of clay, of excellent design that people adapt to different climates, that is found in different forms, sizes, and shapes throughout the state of Morelos (Figure 101).

A traditional hearth was present in most of the households I visited and is clearly a carrier of cultural tradition in my sites. It is so central that it practically

[179] Also called *tlicuil*, this is a Nahuatl word referring to a particular and traditional hearth, though it is also used more loosely to refer to a firewood hearth made of three rocks (or a substitute).
[180] Interview, March 8, 2001.

defines and constitutes kitchenspace, or at least traditional kitchenspace. All of my informants used the Nahuatl word "*tlicuil*" or "*clecuil*" to refer to their firewood hearth. When I asked what the word meant, they would inevitably refer to "*las tres piedras*" ["the three stones"] where the *abuelitos* [grandparents] cooked their meals. Esmeralda's family constructed what she referred to jokingly as a "*tlicuil moderno*" ["modern *tlicuil"*], a triple and permanent hearth made of cement where they boiled large quantities of corn for their mill (Figure 102).

Figure 101: The *clecuil* in Morelos[181]

[181] This image appears in Helbling's text (Helbling 2000: 37).

The *tlicuil* is a permanent fixture in kitchenspace. I found that women make use of different materials including cinderblocks and tractor tires (Figure 4) to construct their *tlicuil* when necessary, and used firewood, charcoal, scrap wood, or even old furniture (Figure 91) as fuel. Helbling insisted my informants were wrong to call their hearths *clecuils* or *tlicuils*. It is interesting nonetheless, that the hearth's use has remained practically the same—primarily grilling and steaming corn-based traditional foods—and that it has kept its Nahuatl name, particularly in view of the multiple adaptations and variety of cooking contraptions I came across in my informants' house-lot gardens.

Figure 102: Esmeralda's "*modern tlicuil"* provides warmth for a hen's eggs

In her study of a Turkish village, Delaney (1991) refers to the house as a symbolic womb, with the hearth playing a central role (Delaney 1991: 233). It is a region where bread is literally the staff of life, and the word for food is the same as the word for bread. She says the *ocak* or hearth, where the flour is stored, bread is baked, and which sometimes serves as a kitchen, is the symbol of the household, since it is "the meeting place of male and female labor at which is created the source of sustenance for the reproduction of the household" (Delaney

1991: 243). In my communities, the location of the stove, modern or traditional, seems to mark the social center or "heart" of the home and the fiesta.

EL METATE

Another traditional item present in most of the kitchens I visited is the ancient *metate* or three-legged grinding stone made of volcanic rock. The *metate* is used to grind seeds such as corn, beans, cocoa, and pumpkin. Laden with symbolic meaning and long a pillar of Mesoamerican culture, the *metate*, like the *tlicuil*, continues to have center stage in many kitchens. Handed down in the family from one woman to another, the *metate*, like the *mole* recipe, is treated like a family heirloom and is the subject of extensive folklore. More than one informant told me a story of their mother accepting marriage on the condition that their husband carry the heavy *metate* to her new residence, even if it was several days away on foot![182]

Figure 103: Kneading corn dough on the *metate*

The *metate*'s use has shifted in the last century with increasing access to labor-saving technology (Figure 103 and 104).

[182] "Mothers, migrations, and metates"—that would be an interesting follow-up to this research, collecting lore of people's stories of their mothers migrating with their metates.

Women's labor transforming seeds into ritual foods such as *mole* or *nixtamal* into tortillas was once an indispensable contribution to family survival and community celebrations throughout Mexico. It still is in many indigenous and rural communities, including parts of each of my sites.

Figure 104: Traditional indoor kitchenspace with *tlicuil* and *metate* for everyday

With electric mills a stone's throw away in the communities where I worked, most women were happy to leave the hard work of the *metate* in the past and either took their *nixtamal* to grind at the nearby *molino* or purchased hot tortillas every day at the *tortillería*. Several women with whom I spoke still used the *metate* to grind cooked beans for *tamales de frijol* [bean *tamales*] or cocoa for

champurrado.[183] Even women who did not use their *metate* expressed an emotional attachment associating the *metate* with their mothers and grandmothers, and often refused to let their married sons or daughters take it out of their house.

I was struck by the common use of the *metate* by women who made fresh tortillas but did not grind their corn by hand. I took their assertion that it was the best place to lean on to knead the corn dough as an affirmation of the ongoing cultural importance of food preparation traditions, particularly those associated with corn.[184] In addition to the traditional *metate* and *molcajete*, also made of volcanic rock and with three "feet" though rounder in shape and used primarily for salsas, every indoor kitchen with electricity that I saw had a blender that was used almost on a daily basis.[185]

LIVE FOOD AND RECYCLING IN THE HOUSE-LOT GARDEN

The house-lot garden is important in my sites as a source of fresh food, though perhaps more in terms of cultural values and sense of place than in terms of the material reality of physical reproduction (Figure 105 and 106). More often than not, the house-lot garden provided the household with some fresh fruit on a seasonal basis. The exact type of fruit trees varied from place to place, with lemons and plums everywhere, peaches and figs in Xochimilco, avocados in

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[183] An *atole* or hot, thick, corn-based drink made with cocoa, cinnamon, and *piloncillo* or brown sugar.

[184] Several upper class homes in Coyoacán, Mexico City had a metate with a little figurine of an Indian woman sitting on top, a further clue as to its symbolic significance and association with tradition, or *lo mexicano*.

[185] See Pilchner's chapter on the Aztec Blender in his study of Mexican food and the making of Mexican national identity (1998).

Ocotepec, and the hotter climate mango, soursop, guava and papaya in Tetecala, and much more.

Figure 105: Doña Josefina with her roosters in the house-lot garden

Women also usually grew a few herbs and chilies there for cooking and medicinal use, almost always including *ruda*—used to cure various maladies caused by "*aires*" (spirits, air) such as earaches.

Figure 106: Señora Rosa making rooster mixiotes

Growing vegetables in the house-lot garden was extremely rare in my region, with the exception of the "volunteer" chayote or other food to sprout from kitchen "dump heaps" now and then.

Figure 107: Dried tortillas and pigs in the house-lot garden

When there were chickens or pigs in the house-lot garden, they were generally in women's care, raised for special events or to help stretch the family budget. Even if a family no longer had animals in the house-lot garden, or did not currently have any, they often saved old tortillas and collected food scraps for a neighbor's animal (Figure 107).

Figure 108: Antonio's uncle making *carnitas*

Not every household had a pig or chicken in the house-lot garden, or harvested fruit or herbs there, but enough in each community did or knew someone who did that the taste of fresh food and a sense of immediate connection with living food was part of the collective experience (Figure 108).

REUSE AND RECYCLING

Reuse and recycling are part of the kitchenspace landscape, with tortillas carefully separated and laid out to dry a common sight. Most of my informants did not like to eat day-old tortillas,[186] unless they appeared transformed into *chilaquiles,*[187] *enchiladas*, or other such spicy dish that is a common breakfast, lunch or dinner in many homes. Otherwise, they are often destined for small animals somewhere in the barrio.

Reused containers and materials—such as scrap metal for a comal—are frequently utilized for storage and cooking in kitchenspace (Figure 13). *Barbacoa*, a common food for celebrations where a large number of people will be eating, is almost always made in huge, used oil drums, rather than buried in the ground according to ancient custom (Figure 109).[188] The same drums, or others made of

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[186] A chief complaint about industrial tortillas from the tortillerías was that, in contrast to home-made tortillas from *nixtamal*, they were not eatible the following day. This, combined with the anti-American rhetoric and generalized anger with the Mexican government's agricultural policies, combined to fuel a powerful discourse against imported corn. Though Esmeralda's father was my most extreme and vocal informant on this issue, many others criticized the lack of flavor and innapropriate consistency of tortillas made from transgenic and "animal" corn.

[187] *Chilaquiles* are a dish made of old tortillas, salsa, and perhaps cheese or cream that is a typical breakfast to cure a hangover.

[188] Beef is the most common meat used today, and while cattle were brought over by the Spaniards, the traditional maguey is still used to wrap the chile-soaked beef.

plastic, are also used to store water in the house-lot garden. Plastic bags are regularly used to cover rice cooking in clay pots (Figure 110).

Figure 109: Steaming *barbacoa* in oil drums

Despite the whole gamut of easily accessible and inexpensive materials used in cooking, traditional pots and cooking techniques based on grinding and steaming have remained at the center, particularly when preparing large quantities for a celebration. A notable exception is the large aluminum pots with a rack in

the bottom used to steam tamales, and which are inexpensive and more readily accessible than the traditional clay pot with a smaller top that was used previously. Older women complained, however, that the newer aluminum pots on the market were of inferior quality than the first ones they had bought several decades ago.

Figure 110: Plastic bags in “traditional” cooking

Beyond the economic strategies evident in the reuse and recycling of various materials, the house-lot garden has important aesthetic functions. It is almost impossible to find a house-lot garden among the rural and semi-rural communities of central Mexico without recycled kitchen containers such as cans or pots holding decorative plants. Together with the caged bird, "*plantas de adorno*" in my region of study are part of women's experience and the material culture of kitchenspace (Figure 111).

Figure 111: Kitchen spillover space: plant in chili can

DUALITIES

I chose to organize this dissertation around the dual physical, temporal, and social spaces of kitchenspace, using a twofold approach to *being in kitchenspace* in Sections Two and Three. I associated fiestas and community life with outdoor kitchenspace, and everyday life and the household unit with indoor kitchenspace. Yet there are important overlaps between the two—or rather six—spaces, and an either/or approach both simplifies and obscures the complexity of the issues. Rather than dichotomies, it may be helpful to consider some aspects of kitchenspace in terms of dualities (Table 1).

Kitchenspace	Dualities	Overlap
Physical space	Indoor/ Outdoor	House-lot garden
Temporal	Everyday/ Fiesta	Cosmovision based on agricultural calendar Festive cycle Stockpiling and preparing food in advance Offerings for the saints and the dead *Promesas* [commitments] for future celebrations Fertility, seeds of the future
Social Space	Household/ Community Private/Public	Reciprocity networks and *comadrazgo*, kinship Multi-generational households *Tías, abuelas*

Table 1: Dualities in kitchenspace

The false dichotomy between nature and culture in Western thought may impede an understanding of people's experience of the natural environment in different cultural and geographical contexts. What might be considered mutually exclusive categories in our cultural experience, such as indoor and outdoor, everyday life and fiesta, household and community, and even work and pleasure, are not necessarily so in others. Just as life and death are not opposites from the perspective of a Nahuatl cultural tradition but rather part of a cycle, it would be misleading to imply that the pairs of terms above are mutually exclusive. In my region of study, it is often impossible to draw a line marking where the "kitchen" ends and the "yard" begins; instead, we find that kitchenspace includes the house-lot garden. I have shown that this spatial overlap in the house-lot garden is a fertile place to explore nature/society relations.

On the material plane, society's relationship with the natural environment is evident in the many elements from nature (and culture) found there, such as the firewood, clay pots, water, the *metates* and *molcajetes* made of volcanic rock, and even the rocks and ornamental plants serving an aesthetic purpose. At the same time, nature/culture is also present in the cosmovision passed down from the elders to younger generations, often reflected in the rituals of everyday life and celebration of special events, with food preparation playing a central role in both.

In my fieldwork—and previous living experience in Xochimilco—I found that regular celebrations punctuated the yearly calendar with such frequency as to be part of the texture of daily life. The line between everyday life and fiesta is particularly blurry in Xochimilco where there is more than one fiesta on most days and the fireworks that announce them are heard throughout the different barrios. Also, celebrations of annual events or family rituals such as baptisms, *quinceañeras*, and weddings in my communities are so lavish as to require extensive planning and preparation in kitchenspace, sometimes preceding the event by years. The list of future *mayordomos* for the Niñopa extends over thirty years into the future[189] and each *mayordomo* selects who will host the posadas at Christmas during their turn at least a decade in advance. While this is perhaps the most extreme illustration of the temporal reach of these celebrations, on a smaller scale, the little pig raised in a house-lot garden to be sacrificed at the *quinceaños*

[189]This list is legendary, and goes to the core of inter-barrio relations and competition in Xochimilco, given the prestige the Niñopa bestows on a host family and their barrio. Like the *abuela's* mole recipe, the list of future *mayordomos* is guarded almost as zealously as the Niñopa. Given this, and how suspicious Xochimilca's are of outsiders in general, I made no attempt to see it. However, a copy of the list from 1987 that appears in a Social Anthropology thesis on the Niñopa in Xochimilco (Orta 1991) lists *mayordomo*s through the year 2023, including the family that received the Niñopa *mayordomía* during my year of fieldwork.

or the fiesta for the *Virgen de Xaltocán* several months away is not all that different (Figure 112).

Figure 112: Twin virgins, *Fiesta de la Virgen de Xaltocán* on a chinampa

Many scholars of Mesoamerican cultural traditions have written extensively on the integration of ritual celebrations into everyday life in the indigenous cosmovision.[190] In Xochimilco and Ocotepec in particular, elements of Nahuatl cosmovision seem to be very much alive and palpable in the celebrations today. What they have usually neglected is the central role of kitchenspace and women in these ritual celebrations.

[190] See Broda and Báez-Jorge 2001.

Tetecala, though with different ethnic roots and identity, is still very much an agrarian society, with many celebrations revolving around the same agricultural cycles and fertility rituals that form the basis of collective fiestas in my other two sites. At the same time, the neighboring indigenous community of Coatetelco serves as a motor for traditional celebration in Tetecala in a case that could almost be considered of "borrowed ethnicity." According to legend, the pilgrimage undertaken by the people of Coatetelco to and from Tetecala when they borrow the *Virgen de la Candelaria* for a week of celebration serves to assure that there will be enough water that year in the Laguna de Coatetelco, an important source of fish and site of regional recreation. The return of the Virgin is marked in Tetecala by a meal prepared to receive the pilgrims and initiates a week of festivities.

Throughout the region, the popularity of seeds as snacks or in dishes such as *mole* or *pipián*, and, together with flowers (which are also eaten in various dishes) as decoration—alludes to their symbolic importance. Xochimilco, the community with the greatest agricultural heritage of the three, the multiplicity of virgin Marys and baby Jesuses in popular celebrations is more than suggestive of the importance of fertility (Figures 112 and 113).

Figure 113: Seeds decorate a portal

A historian at the Morelos School of Anthropology and History and a resident of Ocotepec, Miguel Morayta has produced several cultural programs for television highlighting the traditional fiestas celebrated in this community. Participation in community events in Ocotepec is based on the notion of giving service to the community, Morayta explains, stressing the role of food preparation in Ocotepec's traditions.[191] "*La fiesta es de lo cotidiano—desde la preparativa hasta el recalentado."* ["The fiesta is part of daily life, from the preparations to the reheating the leftovers the following day."]

Rituals surrounding death and performed with food also link the here and now to the space and time beyond, and illustrate the cyclical nature of life and death. Even the rituals surrounding a person's funeral might extend years into the future: the regional version of Catholic tradition includes the obligatory nine-day celebration that is often repeated year after year in what is definitely a celebration in memory of the deceased.[192] In Xochimilco, the mourning party is traditionally invited back to share in meal of *"frijoles adobados*" or beans in chili. One

[191] Interview, March 12, 2001.

[192] When I first visited La Asunción in 1986 I was greeted by a group of women at the end of the *callejón* who were cooking in honor of a man who died the year before; in 2001, during my fieldwork, the anniversary of his death was again celebrated.

informant told me that typically, people respond to that invitation with the comment: *"Pasó a trabajar el difuntito"* ["The deceased has gone on to work"].[193] The departed are also remembered with their favorite foods on the days of the dead in early November, or, at the very least, with a candle, bread or fruit, and water. Ocotepec's celebration of the days of the dead attracts many visitors and has become a major tourist attraction and source of income for the street vendors[194] and local restaurants.

Figure 114: *Ofrenda de muertos* [Offering for the dead]

These customs are changing in many households due to a variety of factors, perhaps key among them the success of missionizing evangelical Protestant sects that have been rapidly gaining converts in recent years. Yet kitchenspace appears to be a site of cultural resistance. One woman described what I call the new phenomenon of "homeless dead." She explained that she had increased the portions of food on her father's altar so as to

[193] See Good (1995) regarding the "work" performed by the dead in the traditional Nahuatl belief system. In this case, the implication is that the departed soul is already working on behalf of the living, as evidenced by the generous sharing of the prescribed meal of *frijoles*.
[194] Many if not most of the street vendors that put up booths for special occasions are not from Ocotepec.

provide for his deceased friends whose families had converted to Protestantism and no longer kept the custom. Otherwise, she feared, their ghosts might be left wandering the streets.

Another woman expressed her resistance to the idea that she should not put out an *ofrenda* or offering of food for the dead in these terms:

> *"Si nos quitan nuestros muertos, si nos dicen que no pongamos nada para nuestros muertos porque los muertos no vienen, que no hay espíritus, nos dejan vacíos, nos quitan nuestra fe."*[195]
>
> ["If they take our dead away from us, if they tell us not to put anything (food) out because the dead are not coming, that there are no spirits, they leave us empty, they take away our faith."]

In Tetecala, while many people did not put up altars for the dead, they were never short on stories of spirits roaming the community.

The importance of proper rituals surrounding the dead is very much a part of kitchenspace. With members of the community contributing coffee, sugar, other food, and perhaps alcohol to a wake, household members traditionally do not suffer a death in the family alone, but rather spend a week sharing food and drink in the company of others. Just as celebrating other passages such as marriage and baptism is a top priority for even the poorest families, many consider the appropriate celebration of the dead a basic need. One elderly woman in Tetecala said she had no problem with people in her community changing becoming Protestant, except for the different burial customs: without the church bells to announce the death of a generous woman who had always provided her with a bit of food in times of need, she had missed the opportunity to participate

[195] Interview with Señora Magdalena, October 16, 2002.

in sending her off properly at her wake. Another woman who told me she was too poor to have the means to celebrate or participate in any fiestas nonetheless found it indispensable to have a collection of cups with which to offer coffee at a wake (Figure 115).

Figure 115: Doña Elvira's cups for sending off her dead

If the distinction between yesterday and tomorrow, everyday and fiesta, or indoor and outdoor is not absolute, neither is the distinction between family and community. In each of my sites, it was not uncommon for people to raise children that were not biologically theirs or even related, but whose parents had died, were ill, or had migrated to the United States.

In my communities, the bonds established through this process of *compadrazgo* and *comadrazgo* are sometimes greater than with blood relatives

and are key to the social dynamics within a specific barrio. In his article on the home, with special reference to Mexico, Stea (1995) points out that "family" has a very different meaning than in the United States.

> "The *familia* is extended beyond grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins in many parts of Latin America, through first, the system of *compadrazgo,* the incorporation into the *familia* of another set of godparents at each of many ceremonies, and second, the incorporation of *cuates*, (literally twins), or best friends. The resulting enormous conglomerate is an 'insurance umbrella' encompassing nearly everything of importance to traditional rural Mexicans: members of such extended families live close-by and often constitute entire neighborhoods. But the importance of the *familia* to *urban* Mexicans is not markedly less." (Stea 1995: 187)

Women's role in food preparation for the "many ceremonies" mentioned above make kitchenspace a privileged site of social reproduction. When a family hosts a community celebration, the *mayordoma* calls on her extended family networks to help prepare food. Besides blood relatives, women's networks always include her *comadres.* The system of god parenting or *compadrazgo* initially associated with sharing the responsibility for raising a child is an institution adopted from Spain and the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. Blending with indigenous forms of social organization and native's desire to increase their status by associating with Europeans, criollos or mestizos in colonial Mexico, it has evolved into a system of long-lasting reciprocity upon which people draw for support for a variety of things, among them the preparation and costs of a celebratory meal. Today, a woman might be the "*comadre de los tamales*" ["god-mother of the tamales"] for instance.

The respect for the elderly that is part of the regional culture also results in a broad web of relations. In Xochimilco, people addressed all elderly women as

*abuelita*s [grandmothers] out of respect. *Tías* or aunts and *abuelas* or grandmothers were part of a family's extended social network, but not actually part of the biological family. Women who came together to prepare food for a celebration were sometimes generically referred to as *las tías* [aunts] in Xochimilco and Ocotepec. The loss of many community members to out migration notwithstanding, people in my communities were often surrounded by family and usually had plenty of blood cousins, uncles and aunts, and grandparents in their barrio or community, if not forming part of the immediate household. All these factors provide individuals with multiple networks in the community via its various members or representatives.

MODERNITY

Despite its cultural significance, the house-lot garden is losing ground to overcrowding, construction, and changing values and lifestyles in semi-urban communities near Mexico City, such as Xochimilco and Ocotepec. Even in Tetecala, new neighbors from the city (or, as one of my informants said, the "modern" children of the old neighbors) complained about the smell of pigs. As I completed my fieldwork, Esmeralda's family faced a legal battle with neighbors who attempted to introduce a city ordinance on this issue.[196] Curiously, these same people for whom animals in the house-lot garden are intolerable swell the ranks of the community feasts, so that it would seem that as the physical space that form the basis of these celebrations shrinks, the social space and nostalgia for

[196] The ordinance did not pass, but it illustrates the tension between urban and rural lifestyles that exists in all three of my sites.

what has been lost grows. At the same time, the steady income that comes from salaried jobs linked to the city, industry, or seasonal migration has facilitated the celebration of an agricultural life that is slipping away.

Women adapt their kitchenspaces to spatial changes in a variety of ways, sometimes temporarily displacing the smoke kitchen to a communal space, like an empty lot, or the street, or, as in Rosalinda's case, to the roof. In addition to safeguarding the vital social space from the construction that ate up her previous *cocina de humo* [smoke kitchen], Rosalinda was able to provide her *comadres* with a spectacular view of the community events that took place just below their food preparation activities (Figure 55).

The use of the words *moderno*[197] and *tradicional* in Maria Teresa's drawing provides a clue to the contradictory and complex nature of kitchenspace. It is no secret that Mexico's attempts to modernize its economy—in this era of free trade and before—have not improved the standard of living for the majority of the population, and that the *campesino* in particular has borne the brunt of the costs. The ambivalence surrounding increasing opportunities amidst increasing inequalities is palpable among ordinary people in kitchenspace.

Many dishes considered traditional in Mexico have not lost their status or appeal in "modern" times, while others representing success and European or

[197] While I do not wish to sound the bells of any particular theoretical approach or academic baggage associated with the term "modernity," neither will I avoid using the word, as "*moderno*" was frequently used by my informants in our discussions about food and kitchenspace, sometimes pejoratively (as when referring to haircuts or loss of traditional values such as respect for elders), sometimes in the positive sense (as when referring to an easier life and more stable income). The latter often implied depending on a salary and not on an uncertain harvest, though the ongoing economic crisis and all too frequent devaluations of the peso often negated the potential advantages of an increasing insertion into the capitalist system.

American tastes have become popular among groups that did not consume them before.[198] Kitchenspace generally reveals people's economic situation, but people sometimes eat and drink one thing at home, but show themselves eating or drinking something different in public due to the higher class with which it is associated. With professionals replacing *campesinos,* pulque is losing ground to "brandy"[199] or other bottled alcoholic beverages in Xochimilco and Ocotepec. In Tetecala, known historically for its distillery, cane alcohol has long been the tradition, though it became less popular after a number of people died upon consuming liquor from a local distillery—that has since closed—several years ago.[200] With many families suffering a continued loss in their standard of living, corn and beans remain standbys despite the higher social status of rice and meat. Increasingly, the trend in my communities is for women to serve *carnitas* instead of *mole*, or even pork in green salsa in order to stretch the budget even further in large celebrations.

I frequently heard affirmations revealing people's strong and emotional identification with their community based on what they considered to be local culinary traditions, or "*típico*" ["typical"] food. When I asked about food customs,

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[198] More than popular, fast food representing the USA is sometimes consumed as something novel or exotic, though it is prohibitively expensive for most. One man invited to a wedding in Veracruz was surprised that the family requested that he bring a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken from Mexico City to the banquet!

[199] Brandy Presidente, a drink made from sugar cane, is a favorite of the aspiring middle class.

[200] I was told that most of the victims who died in a tragic and notorious case of alcohol poisoning in Morelos about five years ago (due to the distillery using the wrong alcohol in the process) were from Tetecala, many of them men who had drank together at a friend's wake. Esmeralda's father was there but did not drink because it is prohibited by his religion. Some people say the dead man wanted to take his friends with him to the other world.

people would enthusiastically respond: *"Aquí es el mole,"*[201] or *"Aquí puros frijolitos,"* ["Here it is *mole*, beans"] or "*Lo nuestro es el mole," "Lo típico son los tlapiques"* ["What's ours is *mole*," or "Fish tamales are what is typical here"]. Tortillas are so integral to the culture in my region that they were rarely mentioned, though they accompanied or were the basis of every meal.

In fact, what is considered traditional food in Mexico today is based on a combination of native ingredients such as corn, cacao, chilies, and beans, and products from around the world including the cheese, onions, and pork products that arrived with the Spanish conquest (Butzer 1995).[202] Nothing represents the fusion of two agricultural and culinary traditions better than the popular breakfast, a *torta de tamal* [corn tamal in a wheat roll].

It appears that the same ongoing and painful social transitions and economic crises that rob *campesinos* of their way of life without offering a alternative and dignified means of survival is expressed in the emotionally charged ambivalence towards the flavor of the "*campo*."[203] *Mole* and beans, though both mentioned as examples of local traditions, are a world apart. The first is a symbol of luxury and increasingly priced out of reach of community celebrations (though still important in weddings and served to special guests). Beans, on the other hand, are the old standby—as reflected in the common phrase

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[201] Mole, ironically, is a colonial dish presumably created in a convent, combining traditional ingredients including cacao and chile, in what proved to be an exquisite new way.

[202] For an extensive approach to food and cultural identity in Mexico see: Pilchner, Jeffrey M. *Que Vivan los Tamales: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998

[203] See Enrique Ochoa's *Feeding Mexico* (2000) for a look at the political uses of food and the government's intervention in food production and distribution to attend to the series of crises over the past century in Mexico.

"frijoles aunque sea".[204] They have been a staple in Mexico for thousands of years and are increasingly rejected by younger generations who prefer red meat, to the horror of their elders.[205]

Kitchenspace appears to provide refuge for culture, allowing the reproduction of "lo nuestro," or core elements of collective identity. Mexico's complex and incomplete process of mestizaje, with its confusion, pain, and racism, plays out in people's relationship with food as well. In the sixteenth century, the shortage of Spanish women in New Spain assured that indigenous women were the ones to raise new generations of Mexican mestizo children in their kitchens, training their tastes in the process. Ironically, indigenous women and women from Mexico's rural areas working as domestic servants have continued to raise and feed the children of the lighter-skinned Mexican middle and upper classes to this day, facilitating an ongoing connection with "typical" Mexican food that is at once associated with the tenderness of childhood and with the lower classes, *campesino*s, and indigenous groups.

History, ethnicity, economics and more are manifested in kitchenspace and have been amply studied. Next we will further consider the gendered aspects of kitchenspace.

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[204] "Aunque sea" [at the least] often follows the word *frijoles* when someone wants to express that they were not going to go hungry, though their diet was scarce.
[205] A distaste for beans among younger people is seen as a sign of disrespect for food and life by older generations.

GENDERED SPACES

The kitchens in which I spent a year in central Mexico were primarily inhabited by the women who cooked in them anywhere from three to ten hours a day. Men came, waited to be served, ate, and left: fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, uncles, *compadres,* neighbors. They spoke little, never interrupted the woman of the kitchen, and left their dishes on the table. The young woman whose behavior challenged this arrangement in Tetecala was described in the worst terms—not only did she not cook her husband breakfast before running out of the house to go to school, but she left her dishes on the table *como un hombre,* like a man, for her mother-in-law to pick up. Different places, different women, different kitchens. A refuge to some, a jail to others, kitchenspace is a vitally important, and clearly gendered, social space.

Figure 116: Esmeralda washing oranges to make juice

Feminist scholars have long deconstructed the nature/culture binary that associates women with nature and men with culture (Ortner 1974, Massey 1995). I have used the word "nature" in the broadest possible sense throughout this work to refer to the use and interpretation of natural elements rooted in a Mesoamerican cosmovision. My focus on women

in kitchenspace is not grounded in any "natural" ability or biologically determined predisposition or ability for food preparation, but rather gender roles that are socially constructed and reflect a specific cultural and social context. I include women from different generations and perspectives in three different communities. I hope to avoid the impression that either *nature* or *women* are homogenous categories and instead make clear that they both include a diversity of experiences and lifeworlds that do not fit into a single mold.

The fact that food preparation spaces are indeed gendered, social spaces may in part explain the lack of attention they have received. Kitchenspace is both gendered and of difficult access. As I peeled tamarind, cleaned chilies, or soaked corn husks during my fieldwork, I often thought that a male researcher—regardless of his national origin, ethnicity, or experience—would not be permitted to join women in these kitchenspace activities. At the same time, many female researchers have chosen to avoid kitchenspace for a variety of reasons. Given the spatial segregation in my sites, gender is a necessary element in any study of nature/society relations.

Women's links to markets via kitchenspace, including the house-lot garden, merit further investigation. Food gathering spaces, such as the markets and small, neighborhood food stores where my informants obtained most of their food, are also important sites of gendered relations and a promising area for future research. Women maintain relationships with particular (often female) vendors for years, exhibiting a loyalty that is repaid in preferential—or at least honest—

treatment, and often, in hard times, with credit (Figure 117).[206] Also, and even if only on a sporadic basis, many of the women I interviewed prepared food at home to sell in the local market.

Figure 117: Gendered spaces in the market

How is kitchenspace constituted as feminine? Besides the ornamental plants and decorative use of wall space, the many concave recipients used for food preparation or storage and found throughout kitchenspace create an overwhelmingly feminine landscape. Women's words, as well as men's relative silence, fill kitchenspace with gendered narratives, and, together with women's physical occupancy, mark it as gendered territory.

[206] Catherine Goode, whose insights and generous support throughout my fieldwork were invaluable, pointed out that while women maintain relationships with vendors for years without ever knowing their name—*marchanta* is the standard way of addressing vendors and vice versa—the relationship is infinitely more personal than in modern supermarkets where workers' nametags insinuate a relationship that does not exist.

Figure 118: *Comadres* deseeding the chilies

Women's organization orders space and sets the rhythm in kitchenspace, as with Rosalinda' *grupo femenil* from her church in Ocotepec, or the *comadres* who gather throughout central Mexico when it is time to make tamales or *mole* (Figure 118). When people come together in the house-lot garden at times of celebration, one end—surrounding the hearth—fills with women talking, laughing, and even drinking and dancing as they cook; the other end fills with men talking and drinking among themselves; in the middle is mixed space with both genders sitting at the tables.

Nowhere are the gender lines more distinct than in relation to meat and corn.[207] While some foods are generally prepared by men—such as *carnitas* or *barbacoa* that involve slaughter and are cooked outdoors—the majority of food preparation in Mexico is in the hands of women, especially traditional foods involving the kneading of corn dough. In my fieldwork, men were responsible for the slaughter of cattle and pork, even when the latter was raised by women in the house-lot garden. When Arturo's uncle slaughtered the *abuelita's* sow in preparation for the house blessing for the Niñopa celebration in Xochimilco, (January 20, 2002, in Section Two) the gendering of space was crystal clear. The slaughter transformed the house-lot garden into male space temporarily, with the young men in the front near the blood and the young girls nervously huddled together in the back. The *abuela* who had raised the sow was even farther away, sobbing in her room as the animal she had raised squealed for several very long minutes as her life came to an end.

Interestingly, in the United States and other countries, outdoor cooking space, usually in the backyard, is often the only place where men can prepare food without challenging established gender roles. The house-lot garden is an important place to explore ongoing negotiation of changing gender roles in various cultural settings.

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[207] This might appear to harken back to a time when the male-hunter and female-gatherer roles were determined by biological functions, though the taboos surrounding gender roles, hunting and agricultural reflect a complex interplay between culture and social life. In one village where out-migration of men did not result in a feminization of agriculture, one researcher concludes that taboos rooted in gender roles and cosmology were a factor (Govers 1997).

Figure 119: Sow's head

Kitchenspace is not only is constituted as feminine but also serves to reinforce parameters of the "feminine." With changing social and economic landscapes, painful adjustments take place as some young women depart from traditional gender roles and seek education or employment outside the home. Others develop strategies to meet cultural expectations at home that are increasingly out of reach. Many women in Mexico today are caught between economic demands that require them to contribute to the family budget, and social expectations in kitchenspace.

Gendered work

"La cocina es muy laboriosa." ["The kitchen is hard work."] Each of my informants pointed out that work in the kitchen never ends and is often backbreaking. Women responsible for preparing family meals were busy all day, going to the market, sweeping the house-lot garden, cooking, serving. As Doña Cande in Xochimilco said: *"Siempre es apúrate y apúrate*!" ["It is always hurry up and hurry up!"].

Beyond the usual, undervalued, and often hidden nature of female and "domestic" labor, many traditional Mexican dishes like *mole* or *chiles rellenos* are particularly tedious. These and other labor-intensive favorites require hours if not days of work, perhaps explaining why their preparation is often a ritual involving extensive cooperation among women. Food preparation for large community celebrations requires stamina and prolonged physical effort. For February 2 in Xochimilco, the day of the Niñopa, breakfast included seven large pots of *atole* that a group of women began preparing at dawn, stirring for hours after their backs hurt. I came to see women in kitchenspace as the *retaguardia* or rearguard, with a strategic role that is carried out largely hidden from view.

Despite the central role of food in family and community life, women in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala blushed when I asked about the importance of their role as cook. Few received compliments in the home, the value of their work becoming evident only if they fell ill and were unable to prepare meals. Women told me they knew people liked their food when they asked for additional servings. Despite the taxing nature of kitchenwork, and the lack of recognition, most women I met derived a sense of satisfaction from their contribution to the family or community. They were proud of their resourcefulness in the kitchen and their ability to feed the family even in dire economic circumstances, and happy to bring pleasure through food to those they loved.

Figure 120: The *cocineras* with reporters

Women are perhaps more likely to receive recognition in community celebrations that showcase their skills, though the collective work of several women primarily brought honor to the hostess or woman in charge, usually an older woman. Older women with cooking skills and knowledge of traditions have a place to contribute here and are held in esteem by the community. Doña Margarita, a great-grandmother with few responsibilities in a household with four generations of women, was proud when her neighbors called her to prepare the rice for the fiesta. Rarely are women recognized for their heroic feats in kitchenspace by national and international media, however! A notable exception, the reputation of Xochimilco's lavish Niñopa celebrations attracted TV Azteca and several European camera crews to interview the *cocineras* in 2001 (Figure 120)!

Independently of the cultural and social importance of food preparation in my research sites, many women were ambivalent or resentful of their role in kitchenspace. Women of younger generations often feel trapped by the roles imposed on them in the kitchen and the lack of opportunities outside the home,[208] and are eager to escape from the kitchen—and not just for the daily run to the market or the *tortillería*. In Tetecala, Esmeralda fantasized with escaping the tedious work in the kitchen and the strict limits her family imposed on her life. In Ocotepec, Maria Soledad, unmarried like Esmeralda and a teacher in the local school, was also in charge of cooking for her extended family, and resented the hours in the kitchen. On the other hand, some older women were eager to retire

[208] Economic and social factors affected women's lack of opportunities outside the home. On one hand, salaried jobs were hard to find and decent pay non-existent, but women also complained about jealous husbands, overprotective fathers, and sexual harrassment in the workplace.

from work outside the home to a full-time occupation cooking for their extended family.[209] In Xochimilco, Señora Rosa could not wait to quit her salaried job after over thirty years working in the city so that she could take over the kitchen.

Power and territory

Beyond gendered space, kitchenspace emerges as women's territory in my research sites. It is semi-public space of controlled access to members of the household and the community. Territoriality and hierarchies within kitchenspace reflect its vital importance to the reproduction of social relations within and beyond the household, and its value as a living cultural archive and laboratory. Gendered and embodied knowledge including when and how to prepare certain foods is selectively transmitted to individual women from one generation to the next along with the grandmother's mole recipe and many beliefs and rituals unique to kitchenspace in this culture region. While kitchenspace is a source of power for many women, many also resent the never-ending and exhausting work, social expectations, and lack of recognition.

In his classic work, *Human Territoriality,* Sack (1986) defines territoriality as "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area" (1986: 19). Human territoriality, he clarifies, is in no

[209] Xochimilco was the only one of my sites where it was common to find women in their sixties working outside the home, and often in schools. One woman told me the local school principal had said that there was not a single public school in Mexico City that did not have at least one teacher or adminstrator from Xochimilco. While that was perhaps an exaggeration, the fact is there is a tradition of women going into education, and selling produce at the market, in Xochimilco.

sense biologically rooted, but rather a strategy "entirely within the context of human motivations and goals" (1986: 21). While political geographers have generally focused on spaces outside the home in their studies of territoriality, Sack includes home and work spaces in his analysis. Curiously, he draws on the kitchen to illustrate the use of spatial strategies, though his focus is on child-rearing and not food preparation.

Future research addressing women's spatial strategies in kitchenspace can contribute to geographers' understanding of the links between space and behavior from a perspective that recognizes the importance and complexity of culture. It would also allow feminist political ecologists to expand their focus beyond the use of and access to natural resources in gendered spaces to explore the social construction of nature in different cultural contexts.

Feminists sometimes assume that women's liberation or empowerment depends on men sharing responsibilities in the kitchen, and women leaving this space for a salary outside the home. Echoing Virginia Woolf (Woolf 1929), one of my older informants who had inherited her family's land in Xochimilco had this to say when she heard I was studying women: "*La salvación de la mujer es que perciba su propio salario*." ["Women's salvation is that she earn her own salary."][210]

Certainly many women today—some of them working outside the home—demand that men help out in the kitchen. It is important to acknowledge the value and extent of unpaid female labor in the home and community around the world,

[210] Interview with la Maestra Ofelia, September 2000, Xochimilco.

and the common "*doble"* or "*triple jornada."*[211] It is just as important, however, to recognize that kitchenspace in central Mexico it is a source of power for many women, often providing women—including or even especially older women—with a meaningful role in family and community life, something that women with successful professional lives in Mexico and elsewhere often lack. In addition, kitchenspace in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala, as in many semi-rural communities in central Mexico, is not a place that isolates women in their home, but instead connects them to vital, gendered social networks (Figure 121).

Figure 121: Two sisters making *tamales de elote* to celebrate the corn harvest

Women in my research communities were often very territorial about their kitchens and recipes, even in relation to their own daughters and granddaughters. Despite their complaints about younger women not knowing how to cook, and men being useless around the house, older women were often in part to blame. Discussions with young women revealed their frustration at being kept out of the secrets of the kitchen until the *abuelita* of the

[211]Development organizations often take advantage of women's commitment to family and community service to further their program goals, ignoring the extent of women's considerable, unpaid labor.

house was ready to pass them on. Young women complained to me that even when they did help in the kitchen, they did not necessarily learn the family recipes. One young woman said her grandmother always managed to send her away on an errand at a crucial moment in the *mole*-making process, so that she never learned exactly how many and what ingredients she put into the pot.[212] When I introduced myself to new informants, they always assumed I wanted their recipes. I assured them that I did not, and stressed that I was interested in the other "ingredients" that formed part of kitchenspace, and in their perspectives. In the end, many went to great lengths to provide me with evidence of their generosity and goodwill by sharing family recipes and remarking on the importance of their act.[213]

Kitchenspace is always one woman's territory, regardless of the number of women working there. When an older woman takes over the kitchen either after years of working outside the home, or upon replacing the previous *abuela* (though the two often coincide), she reasserts her position as head of the household in a matriarchal system. When a *mayordoma* tells the women helping prepare the meal for the community how they should proceed—whether to leave the chili seeds in or out, for instance—nobody questions her. It should be no surprise that in a matriarchal culture where women's power is rooted in their role as mothers and nurturers, older women are reticent to give up their territory in the kitchen, or their sons, to a younger woman. From my observation over the years, it is evident

[212] The mole recipe is always complicated, has dozens of ingredients, and varies from grandmother to grandmother, as well as between towns within a region.
[213]Of course, I did take down recipes when they were offered, because it was valuable ethnographic data and I hoped to try them at home, and because I would have appeared ungrateful had I not.

that many women in Mexico find in food preparation an effective mechanism for nurturing and, to some extent, controlling members of her household.

Never is women's territoriality in the kitchen more evident than when a younger woman shares a house with her mother-in-law. When Señora Rosa pointed out the small kitchen that her son had built for his wife in what used to be the other half of her own, she implied that it was key to keeping the peace in her home. Even with a separate kitchen or house, however, the younger woman's battle for the husband's preference in the kitchen is lost from the beginning, with his constant comparison of her dishes to his mother's "*sazón"* [flavor, or special touch]. Given the combination of sensual pleasure and motherly nurturing in kitchenspace, the bonds between mother and son sometimes seem to take on an almost incestuous quality at the table.

Women's power in my region of work is linked to the fact that relationships are maintained in part through feeding others. There may be more than a bit of truth to the popular saying: "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Putting romanticism aside, the miracle of survival that takes place on a daily basis in many central Mexican kitchens should not be underestimated. Also, the collective preparation of food for community celebrations strengthen women's reciprocity networks and support systems, and provide women with a powerful role in maintaining community cohesion. This despite—or perhaps even reflected in—the multi-tiered menus prepared at the same time for both common people on one hand, and special guests on the other, that reflect and reinforce the hierarchy in a traditionally stratified society.

While feminist scholars protest the lack of women's power in "public spaces" in Latin American societies where men appear to make all the decisions, most Mexican males will readily concede that despite outward appearances to the contrary, women "run the show" in their home. In my communities at least, the seat of that power is in kitchenspace. Unfortunately, as long as scholars look for women's participation and power in places where they are not, and ignore the less visible, accessible, or "desirable" (according to the scholars' bias) places where they are, research is more likely to reflect scholars' own ideological positions and turf battles than the reality of different women's lives and spaces.

Maternal space

Kitchenspace is not just gendered space in my communities, it is maternal space, almost a symbolic womb. Full of the nourishing liquids such as the soups, *agua de fruta* [fresh fruit drinks], and *atoles* that are regular fare, the Mexican kitchen is womblike in various senses. In this most intimate space of the home, even the outdoor portion is often spatially located in its center or at least surrounded by things that serve as a protective barrier, such as the chicken coop, wash basin, and bathrooms.

Taking the analogy further, the *cocinera* is a symbolic breast: she nurtures the family bringing everyone together at her table. Given the importance of fertility for agricultural societies, and the devoted worship of the Virgin Mary in Mexico, it should come as no surprise that the maternal figure is prominent in most Mexican kitchens, as it is in *Like Water for Chocolate*. In the latter, maternal

love is a central theme, with food preparation or feeding presented as mothering, and *la cocinera* depicted as a nurturer. The theme runs parallel to that of passionate, romantic love. In the text, both maternal and romantic love are sustained through food preparation and are reflected in kitchenspace practices and narratives.

In my sites, mothering and kitchenspace are linked. Both are associated with nourishment and nurturing. Many times I heard women say that the secret to making satisfying food is the love the cook puts into her efforts. The cook must show reverence and respect for the food itself, treating with it love. While the idea that cooking with love is not unique to Mexico, its present form in these sites is grounded in Mesoamerican prehispanic culture.

Cooking with corn and making tamales, the sacred food par excellence, one must be careful to observe certain rituals that reflect traditional beliefs. On February 2, in Xochimilco as in many other communities in this region, the corn seeds that are to be planted before the impending rains are taken to church to be blessed together with live children and *Niño Dios* or baby Jesus figures (Figure 122). In Ocotepec, many people will not sell you corn in the evening because it is "sleeping."[214] It is as if the tamales or the *mole* themselves were infants that needed nurturing.

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214 As reported to me by Miguel Morayta, Morelos Regional office of the National School of Anthropology and History , March 12, 2001.

Figure 122: *Niño Dios* in basket of corn

In an interesting angle on embodiment, the idea that cooks must be happy and free of discord while preparing tamales persists in my research communities. "Ears" made of corn husks are tied onto the handles of the pot so as to keep the tamales from "hearing" arguments or being affected by any fighting or discord while they cook. In Ocotepec, women go the extent of dancing around the pot if necessary to make the tamales happy.

The precise ritual surrounding particular dishes may vary slightly from one barrio or community to the next, but all unmistakably communicate the delicacy and sacred nature of the task entrusted to *las cocineras.* The same woman who begins to stack tamales in the pot must complete the task, and the woman who begins to stir the *mole* must continue until the end or it will spoil. In either case, the pot must be blessed beforehand, either by making the sign of the cross over the top, or for tamales—in Xochimilco for instance—placing chilies or nails bound together to make a cross at the bottom. The cook must stay near the pot until she is finished serving, meaning she might work all day and into the

night. Thus, the responsibility of caring for the *mole* at a fiesta is a commitment women take on with the same seriousness and pride with which they would raise a child—their own or somebody else's—and tremendous respect for the sacredness of food and tradition.

The parallels between the strong mother figure and the earth or *la naturaleza* [nature] are important to understanding the socially constructed and gendered role of women in the kitchen, and the almost magical powers associated with this space in central Mexico. In Esquivel's novel, the nurturer is the cook, not the biological mother. Nacha, the indigenous cook, nurtures Tita as a child, rather than her own mother whose lack of nurture literally drives Tita to insanity. Tita herself becomes an almost goddess-like figure when she is able to breastfeed her sister's baby even though she is a virgin. The baby dies of hunger when he is sent away from Tita with his biological mother by Tita's own mother.

The association of women with nature in thought and literature is based to a great extent on women's biological role in human reproduction. Although the *cocinera* fullfils a social and not a biological function, and food preparation is clearly a cultural act, in my region of work, gender roles make it almost impossible to disassociate the *cocina* from the *maternal*. This, as well as the symbolic celebration of fertility in the *quinceaños,* and the celebration of so many representations of Virgin Marys—often with several Virgin Marys brought together in one place for a shared fiesta[215]—seem to be more linked to an

[215] Most often, I found only two virgins together, one—"*la del barrio"* ["from the barrio"]—who stayed close to home, and one from the church—"*la peregrina"* ["the pilgrim"]—destined specifically for visits to the communities. However, one of the most surreal moments in my fieldwork was when I spent an afternoon sitting on a curb in Xochimilco conducting informal interviews as virgin after virgin Mary was carried in by young women—presumably virgins—

agricultural tradition than to Maria, *Mother of God,* and a representation of nature as nurturer.

Pregnancy and fertility are valued in my region, as is fertility of the soil. Childlessness elicits pity and sadness. But beyond what might be expected in a traditionally agricultural region, the children sometimes seem to be treated as sacred fruits of the earth, like the corn itself. It is no coincidence that the corn-blessing ceremony takes place on the day of the Niñopa celebration, the same day that children are taken to church for a blessing.

Narratives of the flesh and body aesthetics in my region stand in contrast to the anorexic ideal promoted by the media and the fashion industry in the United States. Perhaps reflecting the long history of poverty, thin suggests hunger and misery, while plump suggests happiness, health, and satisfaction. My elderly informant, Doña Margarita, recalled with amusement how her doctor told her to stop eating tamales when she was pregnant, and to put her children on a diet because they were too fat. Her response: "*No les falta nada, están buenos"* ["They are not lacking anything, they are good"]. "*Están buenos"* does not mean they are "fine", or "good" as in well-behaved. "*Bueno"* in this case means good as in good to eat. Regardless of the authority granted to the male-dominated medical establishment in other spaces, kitchenspace is not one.[216]

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from the different barrios to visit the *Virgen de la Asunción* of the barrio with that name (Figure 29).

[216] Señora Rosa was not the only person in my sites who refused to follow the doctor's orders when it came to eating *mole* or other spicy and greasy foods, though she may be the only one to blame hospital food for the death of her mother! (See Doña Rosa's kitchen narratives in chapter eight.)

Traditional gender roles in Mexico provide women with a certain amount of power as long as they assume a maternal role and stay within the parameters of kitchenspace. Most women whom I asked about men's role in the kitchen seemed to consider cooking a survival skill that they said they did or would teach their sons, in case his wife became ill or died and he had to take care of his children himself. I did learn of several young men who were single parents and cooked for their children. Their case was always introduced to me with scorn for the women who abandoned them, regardless of the speculated reason for her departure. Always, people seemed to consider a man taking responsibility for food preparation a temporary situation while he found another woman to take over his kitchen. On the other hand, men's paternal irresponsibility—perhaps in part sustained by the very gendered networks that give women such power in the home and reduce men's role to one of relative impotence—was the most recurring theme in kitchenspace, and seemed to be expected if not acceptable.

SENSUALITY AND THE EROTIC IN KITCHENSPACE

Despite the strict social parameters that regulate women's production in kitchenspace, the sensual and indeed erotic nature of food and food preparation give it a subversive quality. Indeed, *la cocinera* [the cook] is a magician or alchemist of sorts, capable of transforming the raw ingredients with which she cooks into exquisite aromas and flavors and, through these, the physical and emotional state of those around her. This is vividly illustrated in Esquivel's novel, where Tita's emotions and sexual energy are expressed through her culinary

creations and the passions they release in those around her. These provide a vehicle for her to penetrate beyond the kitchen's boundaries into strictly forbidden territories.

As might be expected in the sensual realm of food, talk in kitchenspace is often "spicy" , full of details related to bodies and desire. Working with other women before a fiesta, I was surprised at the facility with which talk turned to sex and personal details that were not heard in mixed company. The collective, gendered, semi-public space of the cooking circle in the house-lot yard seemed to invite intimate conversation and hearty laughter.

GENDERED KNOWLEDGE

> *"¿Qué podemos saber las mujeres sino filosofías de la cocina?"*
> ["What can we women know besides kitchen philosophies?"]
> (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, 838)

In her brilliant defense of women's right to education, Mexico's seventeenth century genius, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, wrote—tongue in cheek—about the difficulty she had obeying orders from her superiors and abstaining from intellectual activities, given her work in the convent kitchen. Mentioning several of the "natural secrets [she] discovered while cooking" (de la Cruz 1989 [1695]: 838), she describes several chemical interactions on the stove. If Aristotle had cooked, she asserts, he would have written so much more than he did.

Kitchenspace is at once a cultural archive and laboratory. It is a place where women nurture and educate children, transmitting recipes, organizational forms, food preferences, and a particular vision of life from one generation to the next. *La cocinera* must know how to obtain what she needs in the kitchen, how to adapt a recipe when the ingredients of choice or even the ideal amount of time are not available, and how to combine things in such a way as to achieve the desired product and flavor. In a place with elaborate culinary traditions such as Mexico, she must also know when it is culturally appropriate to offer certain dishes, and what she should or should not serve with them. This knowledge is handed down from one female cook to another, though each must use her own intelligence and creativity to adapt to constantly changing circumstances.

Some of my informants mocked women who were selfish or stingy with their recipes, remarking that a recipe alone is not enough to reproduce the coveted dish, that the *chiste* or trick was in making it with your own hands. Indeed, *la cocinera* embodies knowledge. Not only is she a repository of information—recipes and the accompanying philosophies about life—but it is she, using her hands and body to beat, grind, chop, stir and more, and putting her heart and soul into her work, that produces culturally acceptable and often delectable dishes.

Esmeralda, one of my informants in Tetecala, included ingenuity as a key characteristic of a *cocinera,* that—together with patience and curiosity—is something she must draw upon to substitute missing ingredients. *"Si no tienes lo necesario, tienes que ingeniártelas para reemplazarlo con algo que le de el mismo sabor."* ["If you do not have what you need, you have to 'engineer' things

to replace some of the ingredients with something that will give it the same flavor."] It is significant that the objective is not to innovate, but to achieve the same flavor. Innovation and creativity are valued in the context of achieving traditional products and celebrating traditional fiestas in ever-changing circumstances, not in the creation of new flavors or hybrid dishes.

Cultural resistance, adaptation, and innovation

Food preparation in central Mexico requires the cook to perform a balancing act between tradition and innovation. Women's adaptive strategies are essential in kitchenspace, where *la cocinera* is always adjusting her menus and recipes based on availability of ingredients, cookware and fuel, not to mention changes in her own life cycle and in the demands of people around her. Despite these changes—and those in food gathering and preparation spaces—, a certain cultural resistance imposes limits in terms of taste and food rituals, whether for everyday meals or fiestas. The Mexican palate resists abandoning chilies, lard, and corn tortillas that are considered an essential part of everyday meals in many homes despite the efforts of many doctors to achieve this. In Xochimilco and Ocotepec, despite changing ingredients, bean tamales are still made with a "belly button" (Figure 59). Here, as in Tetecala and many other communities in central Mexico, baking powder is commonly used today as a rising agent instead of the traditional leaf of the *tomate* [tomatillo], and lard is used to make them "*suavecitos y sabrosos*" [soft and tasty]. Regardless, they are essential for important celebrations.

From the vantage point of a *cocinera* who sells delicious *chiles rellenos* and other typical foods in the market, Esmeralda says: *"¡Acá los mexicanos somos muy exigentes en el sabor! ¡En otras partes con que sea nutritivo, aquí que sea sabroso!"* ["We Mexicans are very demanding with our tastes. In other parts, as long as it is nutritious; here it has to be good![217]"]

One can not deny the weight of custom and social pressure in the kitchen, the latter sometimes exercised by individuals with relative power vis-a-vis the woman cooking, such as the husband, father, *abuela,* or mother-in-law. But to assume that the *cocinera* has no decision or power is to ignore the dialectic that exists between supply and demand, and ignore women's protagonism in the ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and innovation in kitchenspace. In effect, it too "erases history" (Sundberg 1999).

Food traditions are not the product of cultural inertia. Rather, traditional cuisine in Xochimilco, Ocotepec, and Tetecala exists thanks to the women who, with able hands, ingenuity, and work, have reinvented it time and time, again despite ongoing challenges and while respecting cultural boundaries. If many families in these towns and communities in my region of study maintain food traditions despite ongoing changes in the social and natural environment, it is because the subjects responsible for their reproduction have been able to adapt, keeping the indispensable aspects while changing the non-essential.

Kitchenspace in Xochimilco, Ocotepec and Tetecala is a site of cultural resistance because it is there that the special dishes for fiestas and the traditional

[217] "*Sabroso"* means savory, or tasty, but perhaps with greater emphasis.

elements of everyday food that nurture the cultural identity of a community are prepared. The house-lot garden where the fiesta kitchen is usually located is a space for the reproduction of traditional forms of gendered forms of organization and reciprocity networks.

My use of the word "resistance" differs with that of Scott (1985, 1990) when he speaks of an opposition, at times subtle, of weak individuals against dominant ones. Yet, like Scott, I am referring to a resistance that forms part of everyday life and is expressed by individuals in spaces that are little visible or recognized. In my view, cultural resistance is not the act of one individual against another and does not require a political conscience or motivation. To the contrary, culture in the experience and spaces of everyday living form a part of collective identity and behavior to such an extent as to be invisible to those inside the group—unless it becomes notable threatened by outside forces. In this case, as when my informants complained about the opposition of evangelical sects to their food preparation customs and their fiestas, then one can speak of a conscious resistance against something or someone in particular.

Ortner (1995) argues that many well-known studies on the subject of resistance are limited by their lack of ethnographic perspective. Resistance, she says, is much more than opposition or reaction to domination and can be creative and transforming. In my region, kitchenspace is a site of cultural resistance not because it is a museum where one can observe the past in relic form, but rather because even when economic and ideological structures have transformed the spaces of everyday life, here one can find a certain continuity with the past that

reflects a group's relationship with the larger society and environment. The cultural resistance to which I refer resonates with Good Eshelman's approach (2001b), even though my research sites differ greatly from hers. Working with an indigenous community in Guerrero, she sees in their use of ritual food the Nahautl tenacity to maintain their own life project in the face of the opposition of modernity and a globalizing, industrial economy.

LIVING CULTURE

> "Food is history, class struggle, globalization, and daily interaction between tradition and modernity synthesized in a tamal de *ayocote* and a MacDonald's hamburger. Unclear and contradictory interaction: tlacoyos alongside a Coca-Cola, and mixiotes accompanied with Sabritas [chips]." (Hernández Cortés 1999: 12)

In his prologue to the *Nahua Cookbook of Morelos*, José Antonio MacGregor discusses the contradictory nature and importance of food and eating, going so far as to call eating "one of the most significant and transcendental practices." It is, he says, at once "a basic need for the survival of man" and "at the center of all cultural life."

Addressing the "important archive of human knowledge" that "finds its center in how man eats" and in obvious reference to agriculture, MacGregor looks at "how society relates to nature through the definition of ecosystems that have different meaning and management for each people in terms of the climate and what the environment has to offer, making use of scientific and technical knowledge forged patiently over a long period of time." Eating, he says "generates significant symbols that give cohesion and sense of belonging, which

permits the construction of identities and 'nurtures the spirit' of man." (Hernández Cortés 1999: 11-12).

Truly, it is amazing that scholars—feminists among them—can continue to exclude women's contributions to "the archives of knowledge." In many respected books presenting recipes and other cultural aspects of "la cocina mexicana," rarely is a word mentioned about the gendered nature of food preparation spaces, or the women who accumulate and transmit cultural and technical knowledge from generation to generation. In general, and except for the occasional figure of a topless Indian woman grinding corn on her *metate*, references to women or their kitchens are sparce among Mexican cookbooks or studies of Mexican food.

Upon the recommendation of several scholars in Mexico, I looked up the original version of a Mexican classic. The "*recetario del maíz,"* a collection of recipes based on corn, had just been published in its newest version (Echeverría and Arroyo 2000) as part of the National Council of Culture and Arts *Cocina Indígena y Popular* series. In its original 1982 version, published as part of the inauguration of the National Museum of Popular Cultures in Coyoacán with the name of *El Recetario de Maíz,* it is known as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's book on corn (Bonfil 1982). The newer version appears to be faithful to the first in all but a few details. One in particular caught my eye: the new edition fails to recognize the seventeen men and one-hundred and one women who contributed recipes to the original recipe book.

Food for thought

Most of us who write articles, books or dissertations depend on our rational, analytical mode of interaction with our environment for our professional and economic survival. We tend to disregard the importance of bodies and emotions, or processes that are not easily measured, counted, or expressed in writing. From many perspectives, it may seem perfectly acceptable to explore the world from behind a desk, and rather unusual to do so in a kitchen. These limitations can prevent us from even trying to understand the different ways ordinary people in many parts of the world experience their relationship with nature.

If you are a woman in a semi-urban community in central Mexico, chances are you spend a good part of the day gathering and preparing food. You probably grow some edible plants or raise a few animals in your house-lot garden, if only a few herbs for daily meals or common ailments, and a pig or two for an upcoming celebration. You may be acutely aware of what *campesinos* and *campesinas* produce in your region, and how this is affected by changes in the water, or in government policy for instance. You are increasingly familiar with markets in faraway places, and how these affect local producers and consumers. What you do not know from seeing, smelling, tasting, and poking your fingers into the fresh products at the market, you learn from talking to the vendors from your own or neighboring communities. You use your senses and your hands both to select ingredients and to transform them into dishes your family and

community find acceptable. This is increasingly difficult with the changes in both nature and society affecting you as well as the materials you have to work with.

Everyone counts on you to make things right in the kitchen no matter how things are outside or how you feel inside. You find ways to feed the family when things are scarce, perhaps relying on the *gorditas* of corn, lard, and salt that you ate as a child and the abundant fruits and vegetables that are available seasonally and that assure a variety of fresh flavors. Beyond feeding the family, you must provide some sense of continuity with local food traditions even when the environment no longer produces what it once did, or "*el gasto ya no alcanza"* ["the budget does not reach what it used to"]. In fact, often the feasts you work to prepare with other women are fertility rituals of sorts, marking passages in the agricultural calendar or, as in the *quinceañeras*, women's lives.

Your challenge is to keep people satisfied even when the corn is no longer the same—some say it is animal corn brought by trucks from the United States. Things must taste right even though, more and more, you use gas instead of firewood, and enamel-coated pots instead of clay, and you feel that you have increasing responsibilities and less time to spend preparing meals. While you know clay tastes better, things cook so much faster in the new pots, and besides, they do not break as easily. When a pot wears out and the man who comes by every month or so can not patch it any more, you recycle it in your garden and use it to hold a plant that makes you happy with its presence.

Figure 123: Doña Elvira's cactus in old kitchen pot

Among the key ingredients in the kitchen are your own intuition, creativity, patience, sense of balance, good humor, and love. Everybody says it is important to be happy in the kitchen—regardless of whether or not you want to be there—because a cook must prepare her food with love for it to taste good, and to nourish and satisfy the people who eat at her table.

Some days it seems that everything is different than when your mother, your grandmother, or your grandfather raised you and taught you how to prepare food. Some days you swear things have not changed at all: everyone still eats *"su sopita, su guisado, sus frijoles. Sus taquitos pues."* ["Their soup, their stew, their beans. Their tacos."] And you are still cooking. Every day.

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

Fecha de entrevista:_____
Nombre:_____
Lugar:_____

PART ONE: PRESENTACION AL ENTREVISTADO, EL LUGAR, Y EL TEMA

nombre: edad: género: F o M
lugar de origen: lugar de residencia:
años de residencia: ocupación:

Su ocupación tiene relación directa con la naturaleza?

Usted tiene responsibilidad en su hogar para conseguir los alimentos y/o preparar la comida?

A veces cuando sale al monte/campo recoje cosas comestibles que se lleva a su casa?

Me puede contar un poco de este lugar (preciso)? Usted diría que es campo o ciudad? Como es la naturaleza aquí y que costumbres tiene la gente en la comida?

Qué significa para usted la comida?

A lo largo de su vida, usted ha notado cambios en la forma de cocinar o en lo que se come por acá? (Explicar)

Qué significa para usted la naturaleza?

Ha notado cambios en la naturaleza durante su vida?

Qué significan para usted las flores?

Qué flores se ocupan aquí para cada evento y por que? (Bodas, funerales, ofrendas de muertos, bautizos, posadas, etc.)

Qué significa para usted el cielo, las nubes, las estrellas?

Qué significa para usted el agua?

Qué significa para usted la tierra?

PART TWO: ESPACIOS DE ABASTECIMIENTO DE ALIMENTOS Y OTROS INGREDIENTES PARA SU ELABORACIÓN (COMBUSTIBLE, TRASTES, CONDIMENTOS)

Tiene usted acceso a tierra de cultivo o al monte? De quién es esa tierra o monte? Si no es suya como le hace para tener acceso a ella?

Si va usted al mercado o al campo que cosas le gusta llevarse a su casa para hacer comida o bebidas?

Donde consigue usted lo que necesita para cocinar? Antes los conseguía en otro lado? Si sí, dónde?
Agua
Combustible (leña, carbon, otros)
Trastes (comal, ollas, utensilios)
Tortillas
Maiz en grano
Otros granos básicos
Verduras
Frutas
Carne
Pescado
Hongos
Huevo
Hierbas de olor y otros condimentos
Hierbas, raices, hojas (etc.) medicinales
Chile
Otras cosas (qué?)

Ahora va más lejos o más cerca que antes por sus ingredientes?

Ahora ocupa más o menos tiempo en conseguir sus ingredientes?

Diría usted que ha habido un deterioro en la calidad de los lugares que le proveen o proveían sus ingredientes para la preparación de la comida?
Rio o canal u otro cuerpo de agua (cuál?)
El monte
La milpa
La chinampa
El mercado (fijo todos los dias)
El tianguis (temporal)
La tiendita

El super
El traspatio
otro

Hay problemas de contaminación del agua aquí? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Hay problemas con los suelos? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Hay problemas con las lluvias? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Ha variado la visibilidad de los cielos por aca?

Han cambiado los vientos?

Hay problemas en la reproducción de las plantas? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Hay problemas en la cría de animales? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Hay problemas para conseguir combustible para cocinar? Si sí, cuáles y por qué?

Cuánto paga por sus necesidades básicas en la cocina, ver tabla adjunta:

Alguna vez ha comprado comida rápida? Qué? Dónde? A qué sabe? Cuánto lo acostumbra?

PART THREE: LA ELABORACION DE ALIMENTOS – CULTURA Y TECNOLOGIA

Quién está a cargo de cocinar todos los dias en su casa? Quién ayuda? Alguien más cocina para eventos especiales?

Le gusta cocinar? Por qué sí o por qué no?

Cuáles son las plantas y los animales que usted más ocupa en la comida? Los condimentos? Para hacer bebidas como tes medicinales o aguas frescas?

Tiene usted algo sembrado en el campo o en macetas? Qué? Está criando animales? Cuales? Si antes sí pero ya no, por que?

Quién le enseño a usted a cocinar? Sobre la recolección de ingredientes en el campo o en el mercado o el mandado?

Usted le enseña a sus hijos (mujeres, hombres) a cocinar? A usar hierbas medicinales? Sobre la naturaleza? Qué les trata de enseñar?

(SEE ATTACHED.) Qué le da de comer a su familia? De beber? Qué les da o solía dar todas las semanas o todos los dias? En diferentes épocas del año? Hay diferencias entre lo que beben los hombres y las mujeres? Lo que comen? Cuáles son las comidas que le gustaban más cuando era chica? Las favoritas de su familia ahora? Para diario, y para fiesta? Qué comida se acostumbra para ocasiones especiales: velorios, ofrendas de Muertos, Posadas, santos,bodas, bautizos, etc. Cuáles otras ocasiones requieren comidas especiales y cuáles son los platillos que se preparan?

Qué comen sus hijos o nietos que usted no comió de chica?

Cuáles comidas que comen hoy día los jovenes son las mismas que cuando usted era chica? Cuales cree usted que van a seguir comiendo los nietos de sus nietos?

Qué tipo de estufa usa y donde está?

Qué usa como combustible para cocinar?
Gas
Leña
Carbon
Olotes
Otro (Qué?)

Usa ollas de barro? Cucharas de palo? Metate? Molcajete? Licuadora? Microondas? Refri?

En qué lugar y en qué olla prepara los frijoles? Por qué?

En qué lugar y en qué traste calienta sus tortillas? Si usted las hace, con qué y cómo las hace? Si antes hacía a mano y ya no, cuando dejó de hacerlas y por qué?

En qué lugar suele preparar la comida de diario? De fiestas?

Cuánto tiempo suele ocupar preparando la comida de diario? En juntar los ingredientes?

Le gusta salir al campo o por el mandado a traer lo que necesita para preparar la comida?

Qué cosas le enojan o dan coraje en relacion a la preparacion de la comida? Qué le da gusto o alegria? Cuándo se siente usted triste? Qué es lo que más le cansa de la comida?

En qué piensa mientras va al mercado o sale al campo? Mientras prepara la comida?

Qué hace con el desperdicio de la comida? Tiene más basura ahora que antes?

PART FOUR: RELACIONES SOCIALES (ESPACIOS DE SOLIDARIDAD Y PODER)

Qué tan importante es la cocinera y la comida para la familia y la comunidad?

A veces cocina usted con otras personas? Cuándo? Con quién? Le gusta?

A quién le da usted de comer con regularidad? En otras etapas de su vida, a quién le preparaba comida diario?

Ha cocinado usted para su comunidad, por ejemplo para una fiesta del barrio o la iglesia? En qué ocasiones? Que preparaba?

A quién le manda (o le mandaba) usted su "itacate"? Qué le ponia? Quién le manda a usted su itacate?

Qué significa para usted cocinar para alguien?

Qué significa para usted compartir una comida con alguien?

Qué significa para usted cuando le ofrecen o envian comida? Le gusta?

Qué costumbres tiene de celebrar o dar gracias por las cosechas y la comida?

Cómo le hace cuando se ponen las cosas dificiles y no hay comida? Cuando hay mala cosecha o poco dinero? Qué da de comer entonces y como lo prepara? Y antes, que comían en estas circunstancias? A quién le pide ayuda? Usted a quién ayuda en estas circunstancias?

COMIDAS DE DIARIO - MENÚS

Qué comida/menu y bebidas acostumbra de diario? Hay diferencias en lo que comen y beben los hombres y las mujeres? Entre lo que acostumbra ahora y lo que comía antes?

1. Qué come casi todos los dias para desayunar? Y de beber?

2. Para la comida principal? De beber?

3. Qué suele comer o cenar por la noche? De beber?

4. Qué comida hace o come cuando no hay dinero? Dónde o cómo la consigue?

5. Qué hace para comer cuando no hay tiempo? Qué prepara que es rápido?

6. Si compra comida rápida en la calle, que compra? A qué sabe?

7. Si compra comida rápida a veces, dónde la compra?

8. Dónde la come?

9. Cuántas veces por semana más o menos acostumbra comer comida rápida fuera de su casa?

TABLA DE PRECIOS DE LO NECESARIO EN LA COMIDA

Lugar:_____ Fecha:_____

Persona entrevistada:_____

Tortilla	
Huevo	
Frijoles	
Sal	
Azucar	
Aceite o manteca	
Leche	
Pan blanco	
Arroz	
Jamaica	
Nopales	
Jitomate	
Tomate	
Chiles verdes	
Cebolla	
Ajo	
Gas	
Leña o Carbon	
Comal	
Ollas	

Appendix B: Glossary

adobo – a spicy, red sauce made of ground dried chiles, garlic, vinegar, oregano and other herbs, often used to marinate meat or with beans for *frijoles adobados*

agua fresca (*de tamarindo, de jamaica, de limón, de sandía*) – like lemonade, a "water" or refreshing drink made of fruit, or hibiscus in the case of *jamaica*

almuerzo – the early mid-day meal around noon that is equivalent to the American lunch (or brunch). Not the breakfast, which may be light or non-existent, nor the "*comida*" which refers to the main meal of the day around 3 p.m.

anafre or *bracero* (depending on the region, same thing, different name) – a small, portable, outdoor stove usually fueled with charcoal, or attached to a small tank of gas

antojitos – literally means "little whims", includes the tacos, tlacoyos, sopes, quesadillas, gorditas, etc. available in marketplaces and street corners throughout Mexico

arroz – rice

asistencia – (*dar la asistencia)* contribute your share, take responsibility for a particular *cargo*

atole – hot, thick drink made of corn in a variety of ways and with different flavors (typically with cinnamon, fresh fruit, cocoa, brown sugar or "*piloncillo",* vanilla)

banderitas de papel picado – the traditional paper banners with designs cut into them that are part of most every fiesta, along with paper flowers

barrio – together with your family, an important identity marker and social unit around which a community organizes in Xochimilco and Ocotepec especially, the first with 17 traditional barrios, the latter with four. The spatial equivalent to the b*arrio* in the U.S. might be the "neighborhood", sometimes interchangeable with the word "*colonia*" though the latter has a higher class connotation.

barbacoa – a common food for celebrations where a large number of people will be eating, always consisting of meat steamed with chile wrapped in century plant, though different meats may be used and the traditional method of steaming in a hole in the ground has been replaced in many places with the use of large, recycled oil drums

barro – clay, as in clay pots used for cooking, or the flavor people claim it gives the food (*cazuela de barro* and *olla de barro* are two different shapes and used for different foods, one open mouthed, the other closed, the first for mole and rice, the second for coffee and tamales)

bracero – see *anafre* above

buscapiés—a type of firework that spins on the ground at people's feet

calabaza – refers to various types of traditional squash and pumpkin

calabaza en dulce—pumpkin cooked in a raw type of sugar or piloncillo

castillo —"castle" or fireworks tower

carnicería – butcher shop

carnitas – fried pork often prepared for fiestas when a pig is slaughtered

cargo—the *cargo* system includes a variety of formal responsibilities (usually considered political and religious by the cargo literature) but also including responsibility for special food in a traditional fiesta (see *mayordomo*)

cazuela de barro – see *barro*

campesino – peasant, or person who makes their living from the *campo*, working the land

campo – the countryside

cempazuchitl – marigold, known as the flower of the dead, it is used in the celebration of the days of the dead

chilaquiles – a dish made of old tortillas, salsa, and perhaps cheese or cream that is a typical breakfast to cure a hangover

chiles rellenos—literally means "stuffed chili" and often stuffed with cheese or meat with raisins, this is many people's favorite food and most women's least favorite meal to prepare

chiquihuite – large basket traditionally used to carry produce or corn to market, still used in all three of my sites for storage and for transporting goods

chinelos – masked dancers originally from Morelos, they often accompany processions and are present at many traditional fiestas in central Mexico

clecuil – a Nahuatl word used interchangeable with "*tlicuil*" by my informants to refer to their firewood hearth. When I asked what the word meant, they would inevitably refer to "*las tres piedras*" ["the three stones"] where the "abuelitos" [grandparents] cooked their meals

cocina – kitchen, also means cooking

cocina de humo – literally smoke kitchen; traditional kitchenspace away from the main structure of the house where foods such as tortillas and beans are often prepared, and where groups of women often prepare large quantities of food such as tamales or mole for celebrations

cocol – special bread from Chalma (pilgrimage site) with anis seeds

cohetes – fireworks (see castillos, toritos, buscapies, luces de Bengala)

comal – griddle (for making tortillas and other things)

comadrazgo or *compadrazgo* — an institution adopted from Spain and the Catholic church initially associated with sharing the responsibility for raising a child as a god-parent. Blending with indigenous forms of social organization and the desire of indigenous groups for increased status in colonial Mexico, it quickly evolved into a system of long-lasting reciprocity and solidarity upon which people drew for support—among other things, for distributing the costs of a celebratory meal. A woman might be the comadre de los tamales [god-mother of the tamales] for instance, or the god-mother of the wedding or quinceañera dress.

comadre is feminine, *compadre* is masculine (co-godparent)

comisión—like an assignment, or duty, as in when women take on a formal role and specific task in the food preparation for a fiesta

comida – "food", and also the main (or only) meal of the day

desayuno- breakfast (very light, perhaps just coffee and a tortilla or bread, as opposed to *almuerzo*, that might typically include eggs, nopales, and beans)

elotes – fresh, sweet corn eaten on the cob, in tamales, or other ways

epazote – (*Chenopodium ambrosioid L. Quenopodiáceas*) a common herb used in black beans and other typical dishes in this region, also with medicinal properties

fiesta del barrio— the celebration of the neighborhood's patron saint

frijol or *frijoles* – beans

gorditas – patties (as if fat tortillas), as in *gorditas de manteca,* made of corn dough, lard, and salt, rarely eaten in this simple form on a regular basis today that people have more to eat, but recalled with nostalgia by many of my informants as they remembered their mother or grandmother. Also, the basic "resistance" food, as in what people got by with when they were very poor and had nothing else. *Gorditas* are also made with cheese or pork rind and are made at home and in the market for a special treat

guera, guerita, guero – blondie, referring to lighter skin as well as hair that is not black, and to light colored things such as beans

itacate- food to take with you, or as defined by one informant: "*comida amarrada como si fuera un pirámide, con sus frijoles, salsa, tortillas"* ["food tied up as in a pyramid, with beans, salsa, and tortillas"], often taken to men working in the fields, or given to guests as they leave a fiesta

jitomate – known as tomato in English, red in color, as opposed to "*tomate*", which is known as "tomatillo" in the U.S. and is green, with a leaf covering the fruit

masa – dough (corn) for tamales or tortillas

mayordomo or *mayordoma*, (a *mayordomía*) – host, traditional form of sponsorship rooted in indigenous forms of religious-political organization, but including sponsorship of a meal, a position of respect and authority (see *cargo*)

meclapil- "la mano del metate" (the hand of the metate") or pestle (see *tejolote)* used to grind seeds or to place on top of tamales so they will cook

metate – three-legged grinding stone made of volcanic rock used to grind seeds such as corn, beans, cocoa, and pumpkin

merienda – snack, often used to refer to a light meal before bed (often bread or tamal with coffee, atole, or milk)

mixiotes – in Xochimilco, like a tamal, but with meat rather than corn, traditionally made with maguey or century plant like the barbacoa (individually wrapped portions)

molcajete – stone mortar for grinding chiles, tomatoes, and more, still commonly used

mole – the quintessential *fiesta* food, recipes and tastes vary but are typically associated with a particular region and family. Green mole is made of from a base of ground pumpkin seeds and is much less expensive to prepare than the red mole that includes at least two types of dried chiles and several seeds.

molino – the mill (for grinding *nixtamal*, chile seeds, beans for tamales, etc.)

nixtamal – corn boiled with lime to soften and make into tortilla

nopales – a cactus leaf eaten on an almost daily basis in all three of my communities, very high in vitamin C, part of the landscape of central Mexico

novenario – the nine-day collective mourning period usually accompanied with food, drink, and alcohol

olla de barro – clay pot for frijoles or coffee (see *barro)*

patrón del pueblo – patron saint of the community

piloncillo – cone of dark sugar that is cheaper and considered less desirable than refined, white sugar; used in traditional cooking such as *calabaza en dulce*

pipián – a dish somewhat like mole, consisting of a smooth sauce with ground seeds and chiles, though it is much more economical and not considered of the same status. It is probably more traditional than mole however, and is the "recycling" meal *par excellence*, based as it is on chile seeds that have been saved from previous meals using the chiles themselves.

promesa – literally means "promise" and is used to refer to the promises or commitments made by people as far as what they will contribute to a particular celebration or holy figure, it is also used in Ocotepec to refer to the pilgrims or people from outside their barrio whom they receive with food when they come to contribute to a local celebration with the fulfillment of a promise.

quinceañera – a celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday marking her transition into womanhood and coming out in society. It is a very formal, codified event, including music and dance where the girl wears a special dress often resembling a wedding gown. Also used to refer to the young woman celebrating her fifteenth year.

recalentado - or heated up leftovers, seem to be the desert to every fiesta in the same way the meal served to those supporting the preparation the day before the fiesta is the appetizer

sazón – special touch, seasoning or flavor

tamales – literally meaning "carefully wrapped" in Nahuatl, the ritual food of choice for special celebrations, basically something steamed in cornhusks or banana leaves, but usually referring to a carefully wrapped bit of specially ground corn dough (*masa para tamales)* mixed with some other ingredient

tejolote – the hand of the metate, to help the masa cook correctly

tequesquite – called "the salt of the earth" by one of my informants, tequesquite is a mineral substance, which is used for cooking in each of my three communities in traditional foods such as beans or corn. Its use literally represents people eating the earth and referring to its flavor in a very direct fashion

tejolote – the hand of the metate (see *meclapil),* sometimes placed on top of tamales to ensure the masa cooks correctly

tlicuil – see *clecuil*

tlapiques – another type of tamal, typically made out of fish in Xochimilco (with no corn)

tomate – green tomato with peel/skin (see *jitomate)* called *tomatillos* in the U.S.

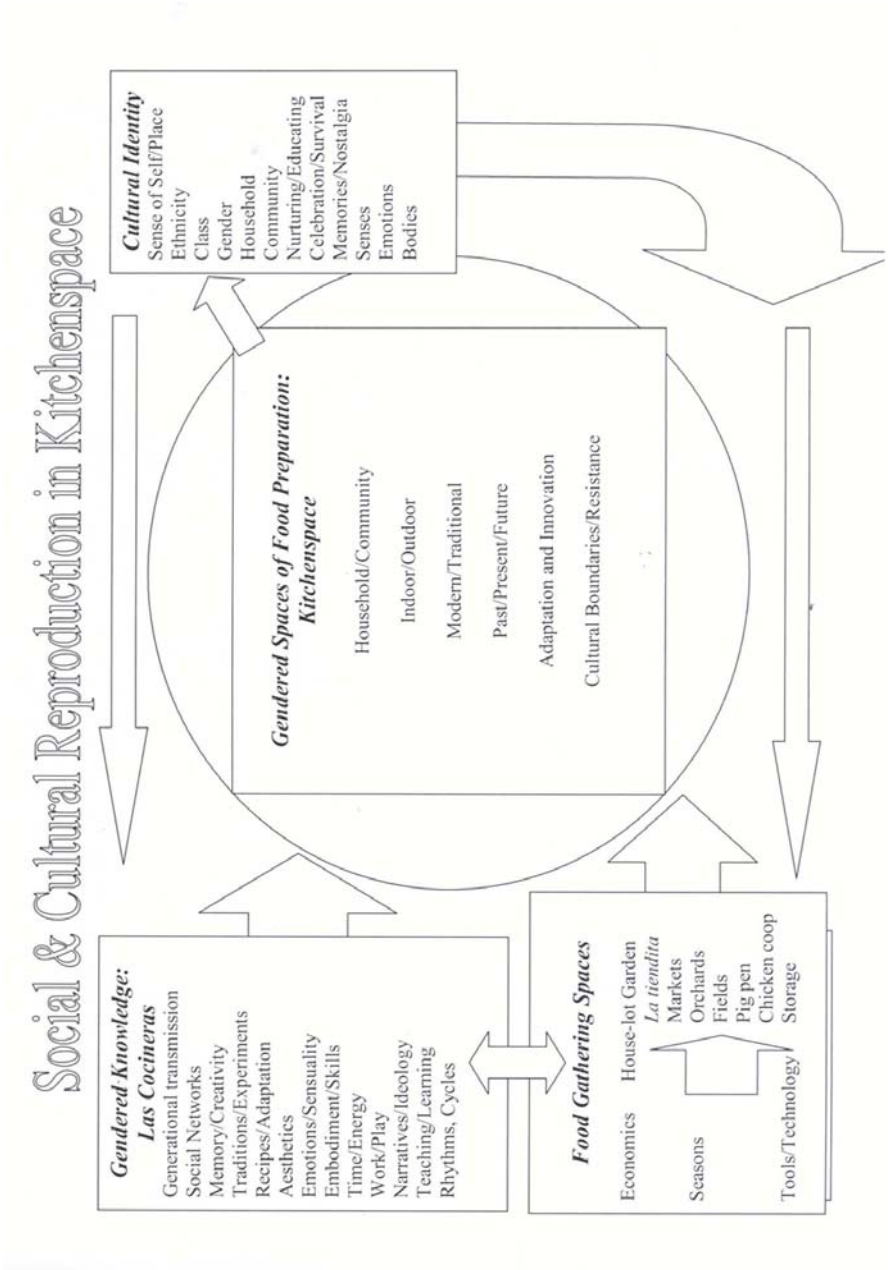
torito—a fireworks bull that is carried on someone's shoulders and spins *buscapies* into the crowd

tortillería- "tortilla factory"

trajinera – canoe-like vessel is used by people to get around the canals that weave throughout Xochimilco, in particular to get to the chinampas to work and to bring the harvest in; it is considered a symbol of Xochimilco

zompantle - the red flower of the *colorín* tree is a favorite food of many in Morelos

Appendix C: Social and cultural reproduction in kitchenspace



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Vita

Maria Elisa Christie was born on September 6, 1960 in Seville, Spain, the daughter of Maria López-Sánchez and William Wallace Christie, graduating from Yorktown High School in Arlington, Virginia in 1978. She worked in the West Indies and Tunisia, and studied in France for a year, before graduating Cum Laude with a bachelor's in History, International Studies, and Romance Languages from the Honors College at the University of Oregon in 1983. Her honors thesis on the global trade in banned and hazardous pesticides was based on an internship with the Institute for Food and Development Policy in San Francisco helping launch the Pesticide Action Network in Latin America. After ten years working in Central America and Mexico, she joined the U.S. office of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide as development director. With a Masters in Spanish and a certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Oregon in 1994, she returned to Mexico and worked on environment and development with government and non-governmental organizations. She began her doctoral studies at the University of Texas in 1995, coordinating binational cooperation and facilitating dialogue between the state environment agencies on both sides of the US-Mexico border for five years. She has three sons and two published articles.

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This dissertation was typed by the author. All photographs were taken by the author.